

THE BEGINNING AFTER THE END

- VOLUME 2 - New Heights

-AUTHOR-TurtleMe

[tbatenovel | Royal Road]

Chapter 22 Royalty

REYNOLDS LEYWIN'S POV:

I was sipping on a cup of coffee, almost burning my tongue in the process. We had been discussing some business plans on the Helstea Auction house and how we were currently at the stage of planning restructuring the guard teams. We had recently managed to recruit a few long range Augmenters, which made an extremely powerful addition to the security. Most Augmenters chose to go the melee route and it made sense since it was a lot easier, but ranged Augmenters like archers and crossbowmen were much more useful in defensive settings. Vince had asked me if we needed some Conjurers for the upcoming event.

"Hmmm... I know how beneficial it'd be to have conjurers that could set up barriers and help support the augmenters, but, I'm against it." I took another sip from my cup.

"You mind elaborating? You just said how helpful it'd be to have them," he rebutted, giving me a quizzical look.

Putting down my cup, I replied, "If we're just talking about firepower, I'd be all for it, but you know it's not as simple as that, Vince. It would affect team moral having a couple of conjurers in a team of augmenters. You know yourself how snobby most conjurers are. I swear they think they're angel incarnates; most find augmenters barbarians for using their hands to fight. Even if we do manage to find a few that aren't so rotten, the team would start thinking we're hiring conjurers because I don't trust them."

Vince's gaze was focused blankly on a stained smudge on the table; it was obvious that he was thinking. "You have a point. We'll go with what you say but we need to be absolutely sure the 10th Anniversary Helstea Auction goes well. Even the Royal Family will be there this time. We can't let any commotions get too big."

I simply nodded in agreement, taking another sip.

"Oh right! We need to take your son with us to the 10th Anniversary Auction. He said

he wanted a sword, right? I didn't know you had taught him how to use the sword. I only imagined you focusing on the infighting style you're so good at with your gauntlets."

"Sigh. I never taught him how to use the sword, Vince. He already had a grasp of sword fighting since he was four-years-old," I let out, shaking my head.

"You can't be serious... Lilia was still scared to go down the stairs by herself when she was four," a bewildered Vince sputtered.

I continued, "He apparently learned by watching me train and reading books on swords. Vince, that's not even the part I care about. It's when we spar, though. His gaze when we practice, his reactions and fighting style. I don't feel like I'm sparring with my 8-year-old son. It feels like I'm fighting a veteran sword master. The only reason I can handle him right now is because his body is still immature but the way he reacts to my moves... it's something that only comes with decades of experience in life-or-death fighting."

"Mmm... I can't say I don't know what you're talking about. I sometimes find myself wondering if your son is actually only eight. Are you scared of him, Rey?" he asked seriously.

"No. That's one thing I've become more and more sure of. No matter what, he's still my son. I know he cares deeply about his family too and that's all I could ask for as his father."

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

During these past two months, it had been evident that there was some progress in Lilia's and my sister's mana manipulation. I didn't need to infuse my mana into them anymore so they could train by themselves now. Of course, it would still take a few of years for them to form a mana core, especially Ellie and her short attention span, but I did drill it into the both of them how important it was to keep their training a secret.

I didn't need to remind my parents and the Helstea parents that keeping this a secret was important but I could tell that all four of them were excited for the day Lilia and Ellie would awaken.

Sylvie had been sleeping a lot more these past two months but there were changes that happened to her. For one, her intelligence was rapidly rising. Her thoughts to me were more complicated and contained hints of mixed feelings. In just a few short months after she was born, it feels like she's gained years of emotional intelligence. One major changed happen recently.

She learned how to transform.

Okay, it wasn't really something as drastic as transformation, but she was able to manipulate her body a little. It felt like it happened so suddenly. I had been pondering how to hide her appearance in the days to come when she grows larger. She was next to me when she started whining and scratching herself uncomfortably. Next thing I knew, her red spikes began retracting while her horns got smaller. It was a mind-blowing surprise. Now, most of the time, Sylvie just kept her spikes and horns retracted, making her look more like a cute scaled fox with little horns.

Throughout this time, both Vincent and Tabitha had insisted on giving me more gifts. Even if I wasn't able to acquire the cloak or mask, I had been planning on training Lilia. After all, she's part of the family that helped my family, so as far as I was concerned, there was nothing to lose in helping them. After numerous refusals, we had finally settled on something they could get me: a sword.

My body had finally grown big enough to properly handle a small sword without awkwardly toppling over at the slightest mishap. It wouldn't be bigger than an adult sized dagger but it finally allowed me to train my swordsmanship with something other than a wooden stick. We had decided to make it a family event and have both my family and Vincent's family go visit the 10th Anniversary Helstea Auction.

Waiting in the living room downstairs for my father and Vince to get ready, I heard an obnoxious knock from the front door.

Sheesh, knocking a couple times is plenty.

I let out a slightly annoyed shout that I'd get it since I was close by anyway. No need to trouble the maids when I was right next to door.

"Who is ...? 00F!"

I was hit with the nostalgic sensation of getting smothered by something that feels like pillows. A classic way of assassination but shouldn't it be used while I'm sleeping?

"Oh my goodness! You were alive! Look how big you've gotten! Uuu I'm so sorry Art! I wasn't able to protect you! I'm so glad!"

"Mmfph! Mmmfph!"

"Angela, I don't think he can breathe..." I hear a comforting voice.

"Eep! S-sorry!" Angela squeals.

Peeling my face away, I smile "It's so good seeing you guys again!"

I start tearing up. Don't misunderstand... These are tears from almost suffocating to death.

My guardian angel Durden pats my head and I see a tear forming in his narrow eyes.

Adam smacks me on the butt. "Little brat! You know how devastated everyone was because of what happened? It's good to see you again Hehe."

"You've gotten better looking Arthur." I see the charismatic Helen Shard with her signature bow strapped to her back squat down in front of me. She lightly pinches my cheek and gives me a smile that I swear could make even the ladies blush.

Suddenly, I'm embraced again but this time, I was thoroughly surprised.

Sniff

It was Jasmine. That cold, aloof Jasmine! She doesn't say anything, just keeping me in her arms and letting out soft sniffles.

I can't resist the urge to pet her head to comfort her when she suddenly peels herself away from me, her face bright red. She quickly stands back up and turns her body away from me.

At this time, Sylvie wakes up from her nap on the couch and trots towards me.

"WOAH! What is that?" I hear Adam exclaim. The rest of the Twin Horns have the same expression of surprise and even Jasmine turns back to look at the cute mana beast.

"Her name is Sylvie and she's my contracted beast." I say while Sylvie hops on my head.

"Holy crap! You already have a contracted beast?! Do you know how valuable it is to have a Bond? Oh man, I've been trying to look for a beast to tame these past few years but with no luck. The ones that they sell are way too expensive too! Gaah!! Lucky brat!" Adam is practically pulling his hair out in jealousy.

Bonds, or Contracted Beast for the official term, are highly sought after by both types of mages. It is a bit more advantageous for Conjurers since the Bond can protect their master while he's preparing a spell, but it's also very useful for Augmenters as well.

"What's with all the commotion down... Ah! You guys are here!" My father, wearing his uniform, jumps down the flight of stairs and rushes toward his ex-party members.

He gives all of them a hug before my mother and sister comes down as well.

"Everyone! Uu... So good seeing you guys again!" My mother exclaims. The girls all throw themselves at my mother and start drooling over my baby sister, both of who are dressed very nicely for the event. My parents haven't seen the Twin Horns for almost as long as me so everyone is just as excited.

"Oh my goodness! Alice, Ellie looks just like you! She's going to grow up to be so pretty!" "...Cute" "Rey is going to have his hands full soon with potential candidates kukuku. Can you tell me how old you are?" "Four!"

The girls were a jumble of excitement and estrogen as they ogled at Ellie.

Vincent came down soon after with Tabitha and Lilia. The mother and father duo were matching in a black suit and black dress while Lilia was sporting a flowery dress under a warm cloak. After everyone introduced each other, it was decided that the Twin Horns would come with us to the Helstea Auction house for the 10th Anniversary event. On the way there, I filled them in on what happened after the fall. My dad filled them in on the basics in his letter but they were dying to know the details. They were quite shocked when they learned I was in the Kingdom of Elenoir for over 4 years.

The ride was pretty short so I couldn't finish telling them everything before we got off.

Vincent sure put in a lot of work. The Helstea Auction house was breathtaking. I've been to many national and historical monuments that were created by the most famous architects but this was on a different level. I suspected that they had a lot of help from Conjurers because of how big it was. The Auction House looked like a magnificent theatre with intricate designs all over. The main doors were over 4 meters

in height and were made from petrified wood. Compared to the naturalistic and elegant designs that I saw in the Elf Kingdom, this was more complicated and grandeur. It was in the shape of a half cylinder with detailed stone sculptures of different weapons as supports.

We arrived early so only the workers and guards were there, preparing for the event. The inside was equally, if not more stunning. The front door opened to a path that lead to a stage all the way on the other side. To our left and right, there were rows of escalating seats made from high quality purple leather. This place could easily house over ten thousand people. Upon looking up, I noticed that there were incased booths at the very top of the rows of seats and even further higher, there was room attached to the ceiling and back wall with glass surrounding it giving a clear view to the stage. I guess those booths and that room is for the VIP.

Turns out, that VIP room on the ceiling was the room we'd be staying at. Father and the Twin Horns separated from us first to coordinate with his guards. The Twin Horns decided to help my father and the guards to prepare for any unwanted commotions or outbreaks. Vincent separated from us next, shouting some orders at the workers and preparing to greet some of the more important guests

Tabitha led us to the viewing room that was intricately designed and furnished. There was a wine rack and a few couches and tables with closer seats by the window. I made myself comfortable on a seat right in front of the window.

It was getting pretty loud, as there were crowds of people who were no doubt people of some sort of influence, filling the lower seats. There were a couple groups that seemed distinguished from the rest that were personally escorted by the workers to their booths. I guess they were some of the more affluent nobles in the Kingdom.

During this time, I watched Lilia teach some sort of clapping game to Ellie and both were in a fit of giggles when Vincent came back, leading a group of people inside.

The first to come in behind Vincent was an elderly man with long burgundy hair that had streaks of grey. His back was ramrod straight with broad shoulders that took off years in his appearance. His eyes were stern, with sword shaped eyebrows that made his appearance look even fiercer. He was wearing a red robe with white fur around the collar and had a cane made of what looked like white gold. Behind him was a lady that looked a few years older than my mother. While my mother had the lovely, sweet, friendly look, this lady's facial feature reminded me of an ice sculpture; refined,

elegant, noble and of no flaws, but was cold and devoid of emotion. She was wearing a shimmering silvery white dress that complimented her dark blue hair that draped over her shoulders very well. This husband and wife duo looks like they're the head of a mafia.

Behind the wife were two younger kids that I assumed were her kids. The older boy looked to be about the age of 13 or 14. He took after his father, with his serious brown eyes and straight brows. His short mahogany hair had a shiny luster just like his father's. Despite his fierce looks, there was a sort of allure, like looking at a wild, powerful mana beast, scary but striking. The smaller girl looked to be about my age, or maybe a little younger. I couldn't tell.

It would still be a couple of years until she starts maturing but needless to say, the potential was there. I couldn't help comparing her to Tess. They would both grow to be captivating but in very different qualities. Tess was the lovely girl next door, with her comforting almond shaped eyes that glowed a faint teal. Her sun kissed peaches and cream complexion and rosy lips. The gunmetal silver hair that glistened in the sun made her eyes glow even more and what made my heart skip a beat a few times was when she smiled, revealing her flawless teeth.

No, this girl was the total opposite. Her porcelain white complexion was a canvas for her flawless facial features. Her penetrating eyes that seemed much too mature for her age was a dark brown shade that appeared bigger because of her long lashes. Her hair was a glaring black, which she got from her mother. Compared to her dark hair and eyes, her lips were a much lighter set of pink that faintly glistened.

While they were nothing more than children now, I would love to see how they grow up to be in the future.

I just shake my head and focus on my gaze on the three guards that followed after the picturesque family, while I mentally compared which girl would grow up to be prettier in the future.

Stop judging me! Even Kings are men right?

"I didn't know we would be in here with guests Vincent! Good, good. The more the merrier! At least we'll have some company besides these boring guards right Honey?"

I raised an eyebrow in surprise at the sharp contrast in the man's personality to his

appearance. He seemed like a loud, friendly guy compared to his intimidating looks.

"I apologize your Majesty! I assumed you wouldn't mind having a few other people with you. These are my closest friend's family." He said, waving his arm in our direction.

"Guys! This is the King and Queen of Sapin. Introduce yourself to King Blaine Glayder and Queen Priscilla Glayder and their children Curtis and Kathyln."

"BAH! You know me too well now Vince. We can't have that now can we!" The King just scoffs while smiling.

"Please, you're about as hard to read as a child's picture book. I would be more surprised if there was anyone who could see you as mysterious." The Queen just shakes her head.

Wow... The King and Queen of the human race.

Mother and Tabitha all kneel on one knee. My mother looks at me fiercely to follow her so I just sigh and go on one knee too.

"At ease! Please! Let's drop the formalities. We're all important guests of the Helstea House here."

Sylvie peeks out from under my robe where she was sleeping and looks at the new faces.

"Kuu?" She chirps with her head sticking out of my chest.

"Oh my! What a cute little mana beast!" Queen Priscilla's cold face brightens up at the sight and she makes her way towards me.

The King and the two children's eyes look towards my direction as well.

"She just hatched a few months ago. Her name is Sylvie. Come out and say hi." I respond.

"Kyu \sim !" She says while hopping out of my robe, head turning as she's looking around at her new surroundings.

"I assume this little mana beast is your Bond young man?" The King comes closer,

squatting down to get a closer view of Sylvie.

I just nod. It should be fine with Sylv's appearance the way it is. "How fortunate you are to have a mana beast. Even infants are not easy to tame, yet it looks like she is very obedient.

"Well we're able to communicate mentally so it's more like a mutual agreement rather than obedience." I just shrug.

"What? You mean to say that you guys are under an Equals Contract?"

We all turn our heads to face the source of the voice. It was one of the hooded guards behind the children.

"Umm, I'm not sure what that is but she was the one that initiated the contract so I think so?" I just shrug my shoulders.

Was it that big of a deal who forms the contract?

"Can I take a closer look at your Bond?" The hooded guard was saying, creeping closer to us.

Before I had the chance to decline, the King stepped in.

"This isn't the time or place to study someone else's pet. You're being rude Sebastian." His kind gaze turns stern when scolding him.

"Arthur. Arthur Leywin." I announce, giving another curt bow. We all took a seat as we hear a clear voice declaring that the auction would start soon.

I turn a quick glance to see the hooded figure staring intently at the Sylvie who was nestled on my lap.

Chapter 23 Auction

"Ladies and Gentlemen! May I say that it is of the highest honor to be here tonight? All of you gathered today are here for one reason and one reason only I presume. It is to have the chance in obtaining rare and valuable items in this auction!"

I hear a round of applause in agreement with the old gentleman who seems to be the auctioneer.

"If everyone in the audience would now kindly turn yourselves to the back room at the top. There, we have a few very important figures. First, please join me in saluting the King and Queen of Sapin!"

I see the rows of people down below get up from their seats, all murmuring amongst each other before they salute in an orderly manner and start clapping towards our room.

The King and Queen step up in front of me and start waving their hands in response.

"Next, the one has made this whole event possible. Please give a big round of applause for Vincent Helstea and his family."

The auctioneer's introduction is followed by another round of applause as Vincent steps up next to the King and Queen and gives a big bow.

I stay seated, looking down below at the crowds of people who are supposed to be of higher class than I, but I can't help but looking at them as if they're...

No... I shouldn't think like that anymore. I'm not a King anymore. Hell, I haven't even gone through puberty. No point in acting like someone I'm not now.

I look at the King and Queen, studying them. The King didn't have a domineering atmosphere. Sure he was charismatic and had a strong presence and I can see how a majority of the citizens of Sapin could adore him, but that was it. He didn't earn his seat; his father gave it to him. The Glayder family has been the Royal family since the

founding of Sapin. I wasn't surprised to see that King Glayder's mana core was only at the red stage.

Turning my gaze over to the Queen, something catches my eyes that I didn't really notice at first. Strapped to the backside of her dress was a white wand. I couldn't sense her mana at all so I guess she is a pretty adept Conjurer.

Queen Priscilla notices me observing her and gives me a slight smile, revealing her pearl white teeth. The word beautiful doesn't seem to do justice in describing her. She was a fine woman to feast my eyes on, but one thing I noticed ever since I came to this world was that I lacked sexual attraction towards these older women that should be around the age I once was before I was reborn. At first, I thought that it might be because of the lack of necessary hormones right now in this prepubescent body, but the more I think about it, I feel like it may have to do with the fact that my mother was around the same age as I was before I came here into this world.

I was never really interested in the human psychology but it is interesting how women associated with the same age group as Mother makes them unappealing sexually. Maybe that was just me. I'm not sure.

Of course, that doesn't mean I'd go for kids like Tess, Lilia or even this snow princess here. They can be the personification of beauty itself, but it doesn't change the fact that their mental level is that of a child. This was the reason I couldn't see Tess as anything more than a friend or a sister to me even when she was so obvious in showing her attraction towards me. Maybe when she's older and more mature, I'll start thinking about it.

Sigh. Being popular is a hassle.

"...kuu" Sylvie is looking at me with a 'are you serious?' face and I swear she's judging me with those half open eyes of hers, staring at me blankly.

"Haha..." I just laugh in embarrassment and cover Sylvie's face with my hands to block her hurtful stare.

Vincent nudges my shoulder at this time, making me regain my focus.

"Arthur, a sword is up for auction right now. Tell me if you want it so I can put in my bid. Don't worry about the price either! Perks of being the owner of this place" He shoots me a wink.

"Thank you." I look down to see the item being auctioned off.

"This short sword was forged by a master smith who is also a Fire Artificer, ensuring that the quality during the forging process is top class. The core of this weapon is made from the core of a Thunder Hawk mana beast. Reinforcing this sword with just a little mana will produce currents of shocks on the edge of the blade, enhancing the power of Augmenters by another level! The bid will start at 50 gold!"

Soon after, numerous nobles had their hands raised, raising the bid. I just sat there, my head leaning on my arm, uninterested. Fortunately, there was a screen that magnified the items so the audience in the back could see. Just by looking at the weapon, it was pretty obvious how low class it was.

Vincent kept switching his gaze from the weapon to me, hoping I would at least be interested in the weapon that most people would drool over.

I just shook my head that was still leaning on my arm.

"No worries! This is just the start! Just let me know when you find something you like. Oh! I almost forgot. I have the items you wanted in the back. I'll have one of the workers deliver it to me after this event is over." He just smiles while talking in a voice so only I could hear.

My ears perk up at this and I look at him. "You managed to find a voice altering mask as well?"

"It took a bit longer than I expected but I finally managed to get one. I also got you a coat made from a Nightmare Fox that makes it harder for the wearer to be registered in the eye. I thought it would be something you would want so I grabbed that too." He just places a hand on my shoulder.

"That's more than what I could ask for." The mask was essential in me being able to become an adventurer but the coat would no doubt as well.

"Don't worry about it and just stay safe. I'm the one that has to deal with your family if something happens to you, you know." He just chuckles and winks.

"Haha." I just smile wryly at this fact. No. I wasn't going to give my family a reason to grieve again like they did before.

There were a few interesting items along the way. There were several beast cores, most of which were B class or lower. The prices for those were astronomical. Even a C class core was around 50 gold, and each class multiplied this figure. There were many artifacts for both Augmenters and Conjurers.

The King himself bid on a couple of them, winning an A class beast core. It wasn't until a mage actually absorbed the core that they could find whether a beast core still had a will or not. Chances were slim to find a core that still had its will still intact and even if it contained the will, it had to be compatible with the user. Most beasts choose to disperse their will before dying though, or have already passed it on to one of its offspring.

I guess the King was hoping to get lucky. The Queen, on the other hand, bid on a mana absorption ring and a couple other items useful for conjurers.

I cringed at the sight of noble men frantically bidding on young female slaves, that were stark naked, to show their assets. I was fortunate to be around people who were above having slaves, which made me ignorant of the horrors that can await them in the hands of perverse old men. Most slaves were prisoners of wars between cities or children sold by their parents for money, but there were also children forcefully abducted by slave traders. My world didn't have slaves so this was something that I just couldn't get used to.

I could see my Mom and Tabitha having solemn faces at the sight of the slaves, but they just shook their heads and focused their attention on Ellie and Lilia. Even though the Helstea family was a very prominent noble house, they despised slaves and opted to just hiring maids and butlers.

Turning my head, I see the prince murmuring something to the little princess but her face stayed expressionless.

This was tedious. Maybe I'll hold off on getting a good sword for now and just settle for a decent practice sword until my body matures a bit.

I get up to stretch when I see that hooded guard named Sebastian still looking at Sylvie.

His hood only covered his forehead and up and from the sight of a cane, I could tell he was a conjurer.

Still standing up, I stare at the plebeian. I could tell by his greedy gaze that he had his

eyes on only Sylv.

After a couple moments, he notices that I'm staring at him as his eyes focus on mine. At first he looks a little embarrassed but he just straightens his back a bit and looks down at me giving me a smug look, as if he had the right to what he was doing.

You dare?

VINCENT HELSTEA'S POV:

It's a pity Arthur couldn't find a sword he was looking for. No matter. There are a lot of swords in the storage that he may take a liking to.

"King Glayder. I hope you found it worthwhile to visit this humble Auction house of mine." I say.

"This place is anything but humble Vincent, and yes, I'm not sure how you managed to secure an A class beast core like the Silvercoat Bear. You've got quite the connections Haha! I just hope that the Beast Will is still intact." He clasps my back with his hand.

I hear his wife mumble, "Don't get your hopes up too much dear. You know how rare it is."

The Queen turns back to talk with Alice and my wife. They seem to be discussing about their kids.

We turn our attention back to the main stage when I feel a cold chill send shivers down my back.

I quickly turn my body and use my arms to cover my face instinctively.

What is this? This was the most secure place in this building with the King's guard inside as well as my guards outside the room.

My breathing turns shallow as the weight of something tremendous is pushing me down.

I feel cold sweat running down my body as I turn to see both the King and Queen in

similar positions as me.

What is going on? What is this fear... this fear that me feel as if I had no control over my life?

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

Oops.

I quickly look away from the pale-faced Sebastian that lost his balance and was on the floor shivering and quickly sit back down before anyone noticed.

I lost control there for a little bit. I just wanted to give him a little scare. I didn't intend to leak out that much bloodlust.

I take a quick peek around to see everyone was either surprised and on guard or afraid and on the floor.

Shit.

I didn't think it would be this bad with this body of mine.

It was the first time letting my killing intent loose. Even when I was fighting against the slave traders, I chose not to emit any kind of intent to catch them by surprise.

Some of the King's Augmenter guards unsheathed their weapons and were on guard from whatever the unknown source was when the King spoke up.

"Who's there!?" He roared while unsheathing a sword he had on his waist. I see Queen Priscilla ready her wand, standing in front of her kids while my mother and Tabitha were both clutching onto the girls.

Vincent called more of the guards in and had them scout the area for any assassins that may be nearby.

It wasn't until they confirmed killing an intruder on the roof that everyone visibly calmed down.

Ooh a scapegoat! Your sacrifice was not in vain random man.

Alice had me in her arms during the inspection along with Ellie who was confused and scared by what she felt. The King and Queen were squatted in front of their children who were both a nervous wreck. The fierce looking boy had tears in his eyes while he was hugging himself. While the princess was trying to stay strong but was shivering.

Fuck.

"Oy Sebastian. How could a royal guard fall on his ass by a little intimidation from an intruder? You're going to die early like this." A hooded Augmenter holding a spear just shakes his head.

"Y-yeah, I just slipped. That was it." Sebastian grabs unto a hand of one of his fellow guards and pulls himself back up.

He looks at me afraid at first but just slaps his cheeks. I could tell he was scolding himself for suspecting that I was the one responsible for this.

"Now! For the final item we have up for the lucky fellow fortunate enough to acquire this..." The auctioneer's dramatic voice echoed in the hall as a box shaped item was draped by red sheet.

A very glamorous woman was pushing the box as she paused for a dramatic effect before unveiling what was underneath the sheet.

Underneath the luxury tarp was a cage that had a dark brown feline infant about the size of a medium sized dog.

The auctioneer bellows. "An infant World Lion! For those who are ignorant of this magnificent mana beast, an adult World Lion has the capability to be at least become a B class mana beast. I dare to say that if taken care of well, this infant World Lion could even become an A class mana beast! Do you know what this means? Taking care and treasuring this infant World Lion can even allow its master to become a legendary Beast Tamer!"

The crowd goes wild as people start shouting bids even before the starting price was announced. I can see the King and Queen's eyes glow and spot the prince tugging on his father's robe, practically begging for it.

Even I sat up from my seat in a little interest. It's not every day you get to see an infant mana beast that could potentially be an A class.

"Ku!" Sylv nibbles on my finger and just harrumphs bitterly, as if saying that infant beast was nothing compared to the great her.

"Yeah I know Sylv." I just smile as I pet my jealous bond.

I can see Sebastian's figure straighten as he looks more carefully at the infant World Lion. Then he looks back at my direction, eyeing Sylvie again.

This guy is pissing me off.

"Now now! I won't be able to start the bidding until everyone gets settled!" The auctioneer shakes his fingers.

The crowd eventually settles before the auctioneer announces that the starting bid will be at 100 gold.

10 silvers were more than enough to feed a family of four for a year. 100 silvers, which was equal to 1 gold coin was more than enough to feed a family of four for 10 years.

I just shook my head.

This was only the starting price. The price skyrocketed at once, jumping up to over 500 gold and it didn't seem like it was stopping.

"500!"

"550!"

"600!"

"700!"

"1000!" I hear the King bellow out with his right hand raised.

The crowd went silent. I could tell that even the ones that could afford to bid higher were debating whether it was worth bidding against their own king. It didn't seem fair once the King stepped in, but at least he had the decency to put up a high price.

The price was settled at 1000 gold coins or one 1 white gold tablet. Something I've only seen in books and pictures.

I hear Vincent congratulate the King, "Seems like no one wants to bid against you King Glayder." He just chuckles.

"Sorry about some of the potential money lost from that Vince. I owe you one." The King has an excited look on his face and so do his wife and son.

"Looks like the royal palace will have a new pet. Do you plan on giving it to Prince Curtis?" Vincent probes.

"Bahaha! Maybe! We'll see how he does." The King just gives an evil smile to his son and winks.

"D-Dad!" Prince Curtis seems visibly shocked by this news and Priscilla laughs, saying, "Curtis, I remember you've been slacking off on your sword lessons."

"Ah! Mom! That was supposed to be a secret!" The fierce prince doesn't look so fierce anymore as I see my mother and Tabitha laugh softly along with the Queen.

"Mama, can I have a pet?" Ellie asks, pointing at Sylvie as an example.

"Haha! I don't know. Mana beasts only want to be pets for nice ladies." My mom teases.

"Ellie is nice! Right Brother?" She pulls on my sleeve, sending me out to battle on her behalf.

I just chuckle and let her pet Sylvie, distracting her.

The 10th Anniversary ended without any commotion and the guards escorted all of us to the back to pick up our items.

Vincent handed me a package wrapped in a black bag, which I assumed were the items once we got into the storage room in the back of the stage.

"Arthur, follow me to where we keep some of the swords. They might not be anything special but I'm sure you'll be able to find a solid sword."

Vincent says, leading me with his hand on my back.

"Oh! Are you planning on taking lessons with the sword?" The King questions after hearing Vincent.

Vincent just chuckles helplessly while I just respond, "Just something I'm interested in, King Glayder."

The brat... I mean Prince Curtis chimes in with an arrogant voice, "Maybe I can teach you how to fight with a sword sometime."

My father and the Twin Horns arrive to meet us at this time, giving me an excuse to ignore the kid.

"Ah you guys are here! How did you enjoy the Auction?" My father exclaimed, picking up Ellie after bowing to the King and Queen.

While my father was talking with Vincent, I see Sebastian whisper something into the ear of King Glayder.

The King looks a little irritated but he just sighs and walks toward me, with the hooded pervert behind him.

"Your name was Arthur correct? My royal guard has helped our family numerous times in duty and I do feel the need to do this little favor for him. You see; he seems to have taken an extreme fancy to your bond. I know how complicated it is to sever the contract but I will get someone to do that and I would be more than willing to pay a generous amount for her. What do you say? Can you do this old King a favor?"

I couldn't help but give the both of them an annoyed face. The rest of the royal guards were on standby near the two and were observing me.

"How much would it take to sell your children to me, King Glayder." I simply say without batting an eye.

The King has a surprised look on his face at my seemingly random question. "I hate to be rude, but I find it disappointing that a person of your stature has the audacity to ask someone to bargain off a family member to them. While I know that slavery is considered normal amongst nobles, I find it beneath me to sell off someone I love for a monetary value. I hope that this has made it clear that I have no plans on selling my bond." I continue, my eyes never wavering.

"HOW DARE YOU INSOLENT PEASANT SAY SUCH THINGS TO THE KING!" One of the Augmenter guard unsheathes his blade and prepares to strike down at me.

Chapter 24 Aftermath

The sword that was arcing down, ready to cleave me in half had a faint glow of mana surrounding it. Augmenting his sword to attack an eight-year-old... this man showed no mercy. The Augmenter guard's face was unveiled as he charged towards me, his hood blown back to reveal a furious expression.

I could see the horror in the faces of my family as well as Vincent's family. The Twin Horns were desperately trying to make their way towards the attacker to stop him from creating two vertical halves of me. Even the King had a surprised look on his face at the unprecedented action of his guard, while his wife was already frantically reaching for her wand.

I look up lazily at the mage about to swing down. Whether it was because he was angry or because he was just looking down on me since I'm a child, his attack was mediocre at best. I don't even will mana into my body as I take a step forward with my right foot as he's on his downward swing and reach up to grab the corner between the crossguard and the grip.

Using the momentum of his swing, I pivot my front foot, still holding unto the cross-guard while my body is now parallel to the Augmenter. His reinforced sword slashes through the empty space my body was at before and creates a small fissure in the ground, imbedding the sword. In one quick movement, I give a quick strike at his chin that he didn't bother reinforcing with mana. The force of my upward punch and his downward movement while he was swinging created a bigger sound than I imagined and I just hear a soft 'oof' before he crumbles, passed out.

I glance to see the poor fool called Sebastian grinding his teeth as he's muttering a spell in silent.

SEBASTIAN'S POV:

That impudent brat! He should know his place! When the King asks for something, it's not a request; it's an order! How dare he not only refuse, but also reprimand our noble King! That brat doesn't deserve his bond! I come from a family of pure Conjurers, the

elites of the mages capable of bending nature at will. Yet, why do I not have a beast contract while that brat has one that can form an Equals Contract at such a young age! That means the level of that beast is at least an A class.

I'm the one that deserves the magnificent steed that beast will grow up to become! Yet, he refused me! He refused the King!

I can't help but grind my teeth in frustration.

"HOW DARE YOU INSOLENT PEASANT SAY SUCH THINGS TO THE KING!"

I see Harry scream while charging with his sword in the air.

YES! Kill that brat! I guess Augmenters do have their uses at times. After the brat is dead, I'll rightfully have that black mana beast.

But before I can even start cheering him, he's knocked out.

""

What the hell?

How did that useless half-wit fool knock himself out? Ugh... I'll have to handle this myself.

But before I pull out my cane, I see the brat walking towards me.

Is he asking to die? I don't care at this point. That non-mage Vincent is a close friend of our King but I'll probably just get out of killing some random brat with just a light punishment. That mana Beast is worth it.

I'm murmuring a spell silently; ready to blow his head off from his body. He can see my mouth move but he's still walking towards to me?

Cheh! Thanks for making it easier brat. Yet, why I feel like that brat, who's half my height, is somehow looking down at me, as if superior.

You're just making me want to kill you, aren't you, brat?

He's in front of me as I'm about the finish my fire spark spell.

CRAAAACCK

"Thud!"

That's weird, why did I suddenly lose balance?

I look down to see that my knee is bent at an inverted angle and I see my bones with tendons still attached, sticking out of my skin.

T-that's MY leg!

"GGAAAHHHHH!"

"M-MY LEG! MY LEG!!" I've never felt such an excruciating pain as great as this before. Why would a noble conjurer need to exert himself to feel pain?

Why is no one helping me? I look around and see everyone frozen. No, they're not just surprised but really frozen in place. Are my eyes going bad from the pain? I'm seeing everything, everyone around me as if I'm looking through in an inverted color.

""

"This space won't last long so I'll make it quick. I advise you that it would be in the best interest of both of us that you stop your hopeless pursuit of my bond. I do not wish to make an enemy of our Kingdom's leader so I am giving you this last chance."

The boy was speaking in a manner that made me forget he was only eight years old. The tone of the words he articulated carried power and dignity, pressuring me to comply while sending shivers down my back.

He turns his back to me and walks away, taking a few steps before he turns his head back.

He's looking down at me with an emotionless face, with eyes that seem to pierce directly into my head like a hot needle, actually making me wince from pain.

No... No, no, no. I can't breathe. I'm so scared I can't even feel the pain. I feel a warm sensation between my legs as my body just accepts its fate and prepares to die.

He squats down and glares at me with his eyes narrowed, looking at me as if I was an

insect.

His eyes glaring down at me as if I was an insect, he mouths,

"Know your place."

KING GLAYDER'S POV:

The reasoning of this 8-year-old child fascinates me more than the implication of his message towards the King of this country.

While Sebastian is a loyal guard that has served us for decades, him asking me to tell the kid to give up his bond was something that I should've never done. Yet I promised him beforehand and who would I be if I went back on my word.

Then everything went south. Do the Royal Knight Guards only amount to this much... to rush in hotheaded because of a provocation by an 8-year-old???

Even if I didn't bring my personal Templar Knights, thinking that there wouldn't be any troubles, I didn't think these fresh trainees would cause this much trouble.

While surprised, I quickly keep a composed face. What's done is done. If a royal guard kills a child, then the public may pity the kid and his family for a couple of days but ultimately blame it on the parents for not raising the child right.

It's a pity that the kid's family is friends with Vincent. Cutting ties with Vincent may turn out to be a little inconvenient in the future.

Yet, I can only raise my eyebrows at the astonishing movements of the 8-year-old who quickly knocked out my Royal Guard.

Harry, that fool. How inexperienced is he to not even reinforce his body! He's only giving a bad name to the Royal Knights of Sapin!

"KKYYAAAAAAAA!" I bolt my head up in surprise at the shrill scream.

My wife is wide-eyed looking down at something behind me.

How is Sebastian, who was fine just a second ago on the ground clutching his left leg that has several shards of bone sticking out, glaring daggers at the boy.

I see him fumble for his cane on the ground, pointing it at the boy, mumbling a spell.

"ENOUGH! HOW DARE YOU SEBASTIAN!" Does this ignorant fool not know that this whole dilemma stemmed from his greed for a child's bond?

I grab ahold of his cane and snap it in half. Sebastian looks at me in shock as If I betrayed him.

This pathetic ingrate...

"Stand down! This matter is over." I growl menacingly at him. He is in the presence of a King. No matter how much he's used to it, it's best to remind him that I have the means to end his life on my whim.

The boy faints now and I see his family and co. rush after him. Settling this incident will be rather tiring.

I can see that the boy's family and friends are struggling to lash out at me.

How wise of them to know their place in front of their King.

"Sigh... I imagine that the boy should be treated so please excuse yourselves so that we may settle this matter another time." I simply say, herding my wife and children, while the two pathetic clowns that I was foolish enough to once call Royal Knights were picked up by his teammates

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

UGHH my fucking head!

My vision clears and I turn my head to the right and left.

I'm in my room.

"Kyu!!" Sylvie stirs awake almost immediately and begins licking my face. 'You're awake! You're awake!' she speaks to me mentally, her tail wagging fiercely.

"Mmm? Oh you're finally awake!" My mom had her head in her arms leaning on my bed.

"The doctor just said you fell unconscious probably due to shock, and that you'd wake up soon. I didn't think you'd be asleep for 8 hours though." She pets my hair, giving me a soft smile.

I could tell by her red eyes that she was crying for a while.

Dammit, I made her worry again.

"What happened after I passed out?" I sit up in bed, placing the bouncing Sylvie on my lap.

"We all left a bit after you fell unconscious. No one was in the right state of mind so the King excused himself first. Your father is downstairs with the King's representative. They're in the living room discussing what happened." She looks a little worried at this.

I just nod and get off of bed. My body still feels heavy from using the first phase of Sylvia's Dragon Will so I just walk slowly downstairs with Mother after she checked up on Ellie who was asleep in her room.

As we make ourselves downstairs, I hear my father along with an elderly man's hoarse voice.

Upon seeing me, the representative stands up, giving a slight bow, looking a little relieved. My father's back was facing me so he only turned back after he saw the old man getting up.

"My son! You're up!" He hurdled himself over the couch and picked me up.

"Yeah, I'm fine Dad. What are you guys talking about?" I nod.

This representative came by with a few gold coins as a token of apology from the King for the "small incident" my father said through clenched teeth.

"The Royal King has also ordered me to inform the Leywin family that both guards that tried to attack Arthur Leywin have been stripped of nobility.

"For almost killing my son, the King just flicks them on the forehead and pats them goodbye?" My father can't help but turning red from frustration.

"Father, it's all right. I wasn't hurt. Let's just end this matter." I squeeze my father's hand, looking up.

The King seemed like a nice character but in times like this, I guess he has his priorities elsewhere.

The representative just looks at us matter-of-factly as if it was a given that the King did the right thing.

I'm too tired for this shit.

Casting aside that issue, I ask about Sebastian, in case he said anything. "What happened to the Conjurer that had his knee broken?"

The representative just shakes his head a little, "We do not know. The experts that we have hypothesize that it was due to the ricochet in the mana that the Knight that attacked you with hit his knee.

I just shrug at this, looks like this matter is settled.

The old man took his leave after my father was growing impatient with his attitude and just gave me a grin.

"Good job knocking out that Augmenter. That's my son." He shoots me a fist, which I smile and promptly pound with my fist.

"Where are the Twin Horns anyway? I thought they'd be here?"

My mother answers, just chuckling, "We had to keep them away from this matter, or else they might've turned into wanted criminals."

I laugh at this, but by the helpless look on my father's face, it was a genuine worry. The Twin Horns were waiting at a nearby Inn. My father told me we would all head out there tomorrow for breakfast and discuss me being an Adventurer with them. I nod at this and go back into my room. My birthday is in less than two weeks. I'll be able to make my first mark here in this world.

Back in my bed, I look at the palm of my hands, idly thinking about today's events. This was the first time I used Sylvia's Dragon's Will. The years of studying Sylvie's will while assimilating it into my body and practicing it for 4 months, I couldn't help sigh in

wonder at how powerful Sylvia was.

I was just tapping into the ocean that was Sylvia's powers. Unlike Grandpa Virion who could only get a speed boost and camouflage into his surroundings, I guess being a legacy tamer allowed me to access a lot more of Sylvia's powers at stage one.

What I used on Sebastian was something I named 'Distortion'. I could basically separate myself from the time and space of my surrounding for a brief moment. I can't alter anything else but it gives me the time to assess my situation. Earlier today, I really went outside my limit by using Distortion on another person as well. This allowed me to get away unnoticed from the King's eyes for now. I wasn't strong enough to act against him yet.

The limit on using Distortion on myself without backlash is 2 seconds. I used it today on another person too and I prolonged it to 7 seconds. Just to scare that bug Sebastian, I used up all of my mana and passed out for half a day. Maybe I should've just killed him.

No. I can't think like that anymore. Creating meaningless deaths just for my convenience isn't something I should do in this world. I need to be different in this world.

I shake head. I have a lot of time. I have to be patient.

I unwrap the package that Vincent left beside my bed to see a pearl white mask that could cover my whole face. It was a simple mask with two sharp eye slits that curved up, reminding me of a fox's eyes. There was no nose or mouth hole; just a single blue streak that ran straight down the left side of the mask, through the left eye slit.

I tried the mask on, which somehow stuck onto my face without any need of a strap, and wore the midnight blue coat, which was a little long. After strapping the coat, it suddenly shrunk, fitting my body perfectly.

I couldn't help getting embarrassed from feeling like a wannabe assassin or vigilante of some sort.

"Ahh, ahh. Testing." The tone of my voice surprised me. It sounded completely different. My once immature, high-pitched voice now had a rich baritone voice.

"Kuu?" Sylvie just looks at me curiously and I just laugh, taking off my getup.

"Aren't you excited to start getting a little bit action as well Sylv?" I pet her head, going to bed while dreaming of the future.

Chapter 25 Partners In Crime

"So... who's it going to be?" My father sips his coffee and sets it down on the round wooden table we were all seated around.

My family just finished eating breakfast with the Twin Horns party at the inn they were currently staying at while Mother was currently wiping off the remains of food chunks that managed to escape my sister's mouth.

"Kuu!" Sylvie hops unto the table with her head held high. Even without mental transmission, everyone was able to make out that, 'I'm enough to protect Papa' was what she was thinking.

"Sylviee! Come here!" My sister waggles a piece of meat in front of her, luring my legendary dragon bond that was now looking at her, drooling like a starving puppy.

Sigh... I couldn't help but chuckle at the thought of her shaking her tail at a bandit smart enough to lure her away with a piece of meat.

My father's ex party members just finished a dungeon exploration with several other parties so they would have some free time until they decided on taking another mission or quest.

Adam spoke up first while polishing his beloved spear. "Babysitting doesn't really fit my style so I'll pass on this. Besides, I feel like with my personality, Arthur will kill me in my sleep one day."

My father just nods. He knew what kind of temperament Adam had and knew we wouldn't be a great fit.

"I was hoping Durden or Helen would accompany Arthur. Honestly, I can't offer much but Alice and I are more than willing to compensate for doing this."

"Don't talk like that Rey, we're all family here. I would love to accompany him and watch him grow anyhow." The gentle giant responds, looking at me.

"Durden is right. You know we're not doing this for the money. Besides, we managed to get quite a bit of treasures off of our last dungeon raid." Helen just shakes her head.

Suddenly I see a hand raised and we all turn to look.

"I would like to volunteer."

"J-jasmine? You want to go with Arthur?" Angela just sputters, while looking at her dual wielding teammate. She's been the one most excited to go with me.

I feel like Angela would be a greater source of danger than the possible threats of an Adventurer in more ways than one. I tried to lightly hint that she might not be the most suitable but even I was surprised that Jasmine would take the initiative to accompany me.

"Hmm... Logically speaking, Jasmine is the most suitable to protect Arthur. Durden specializes in offensive area of effect spells. I do want to go with Arthur too but I feel that maybe I'm not the most suitable since protecting isn't really my strong suit." Helen just scratches her head.

"Jasmine, are you really okay with going along with Arthur?" My mother asks, concerned.

Nod She gives her a determined look.

"Pfft! The lady says she wants to go. She's the only Augmenter among us that has an elemental affinity! She just reached dark yellow stage last year, and coupled with her wind attribute, I think she'll be the best suited." Adam just laughs as he rests both his hands on top of his head, leaning back on his chair.

"Hmm... For Arthur's safety, I guess I'll just have to step down from this. It's a pity though." Durden just scratches his head weakly.

"Sorry Durden, I know how much you care about Arthur." My father just gives him a sympathetic smile.

"Maybe I'll join the Twin Horns on a dungeon raid in the future!" I exclaim.

Durden just chuckles at this and gives me a nod as he pats my head. The rest of the Twin Horns laugh as we finish up our conversation.

It was decided that in a week's time, I would go with Jasmine to the Adventurer's Guild and register myself. I should automatically start off at the E class after passing a simple test and depending on how well I do on missions or on quests, my class will rise accordingly.

Getting back home, I spot Lilia downstairs meditating as a maid places a cup of water by her side.

"Uu... Lily no fair! Training without me!" I see my sister rush over and get in a comfortable position to start her mana manipulation as well.

As far as I could tell, it would take the both of them a couple more years to actually form a mana core, but by the pace that Lilia is going, I imagine that she'll awaken around the average time most children do.

Ellie doesn't have the patience for training and gets bored after an hour or two so it'll take her a lot longer. That's fine though, I wouldn't want her to become a mage too early. She'll attract too much unwanted attention. I'll be thankful if she can form a mana core by the age of 9 or 10.

"Dad, can we go to the Auction House again to pick out a sword? We couldn't get to after the incident and I wanted to start practicing."

"Yeah, I have a few things I need to tell my team there anyway. We'll ask for a carriage so go on and wash up."



We met up with the Helstea family in front of the Auction house. Tabitha had a relieved look on her face as she asked if I was okay which I just nodded to. I told the family not to worry and that I was fine. I could tell that Vincent was less than thrilled by the treatment the King had towards all of this, but at this point, just like how the King felt towards me, I only felt apathy towards him. He didn't put into me any sort of consideration outside of a less than significant child, which suited me just fine for now.

The King's representative told us that they stripped the Augmenter and Sebastian of their nobility, but Vincent just rolled his eyes at this, saying this just meant that they only had to retrain as a Royal Guard and they'd receive their positions back. I felt my father clench his fists by the injustice of this all, but I figured something like this would

happen.

Father went off with Vincent to meet the guards while Tabitha went back to take care of Lilia, leaving me to search for a sword on my own.

The back of the Helstea Auction House stored a lot of goods that they traded in, either from different merchants and adventurers or from the dwarf kingdom.

There were almost no business transactions done with elves ever since the war over a neutral territory reached a stalemate. Over the years, relations between the two races have gotten better, to the point of even having a friendly tournament, but it'll be a slow process until the enmity is actually eased. This was a pity, since elf weapons did have their advantages compared to human and dwarf weapons.

Something I learned while I was living with the Eralith family in Elenoir was that, while both weapons and Armors forged by dwarves were considered the highest class because of the race's innate mastery in the field, elves had their specialties in bows and Conjurer staffs/wands.

Most of the enchanted weapons were bid during the event yesterday, so the only things left that were going to be sold in stalls later on were regular weapons. I wasn't looking for anything special, just dependable.

Looking at the racks and taking a few out of the shelves to test, I cringed at the poor workmanship on these swords. The balance between the blade and the grip was all a bit off and most were weapons that relied on just simple swings and stabs.

It wasn't that they were necessarily bad, but I guess after using a master level sword for so long, I turned rather nitpicky about my sword.

Sylvie was nestled on my head, looking at the blades in curiosity.

I went farther in, going past the blades put up in display and into the section where the swords were just stored in crates and barrels.

One thing I noticed about the swords in this world was that they fell into a couple of categories:

There were the large swords, either the wide heavy swords, or the long claymores. Many warriors and offensive Augmenters prefer these behemoths but many consider them savage and unrefined.

The more balanced swords, seen most commonly used by knights and adventurers alike, are the broadswords. These are usually one-handed and are coupled with shields, but there are two-handed varieties. These swords provided the best all-around performance and were the standard type of swords.

The last category is the one-handed light swords. This includes sabers, single-edged curved blades (which is basically a katana), rapiers and daggers/short swords. Sabers, katanas, and rapiers are focused on speed and precision while daggers and short swords are often utilized for dual-wield swordsman.

Even if the weapons here are somewhat second rate, I can't help but be excited, being surrounded by what I was most passionate about and proud of being the best at.

Sighing in disappointment, as my effortful digging remained fruitless, I mindlessly swing the plain short sword I had in my hand. I decided I would have to settle for this sword if I couldn't find anything else.

I kept walking and soon passed the swords section into the miscellaneous section. I could see various unique weapons that were either too flamboyant to be of any use in real battle, or simply just inefficiently designed.

Navigating through the aisles, I chuckled out loud when I found something very similar to nun chucks. There was even a morning star that was heavy enough that, even after using mana, I was barely able lift the spiked head off the ground.

"Whew! Looks like a dead end Sylv." I just sat down on the ground, leaning against a gigantic shield while Sylvie was trotting around, exploring.

"Kuu!" I look up to see Sylv digging through the piles of weapons. I just tilt my head.

I could hear her running around, creating debris of dust whenever she started rummaging around.

Suddenly, I hear her squeak an, 'I found something!' to me. Getting up, I follow Sylvie and she lifts her paw and points excitedly at a black... stick.

It was about 60 centimeters in length and just looked to me like a black walking cane to me.

"This wasn't what I was looking for Sylv." I say, but she keeps insisting I check it out for some reason.

I was surprised by the weight of the black stick, measuring at about 5 cm wide and 2 cm thick.

While it seemed to be made of some kind of hard wood, it weighed a lot more than just a walking stick.

I bring it closer to my face, trying to get a better view in this dimly lit place.

The stick had a matte coat to it, not reflecting any light at all, while the whole thing was smooth to the touch.

Looking closer, there were intricate indentations that formed a design throughout the pole, but other than that, I couldn't' find anything special about it.

Sylv is staring at me like she was responsible for finding the lost treasure of Atlantis or something as her eyes were sparkling, her tail wagging fiercely.

Sigh... Just to make her feel better, I swing the stick.

"Oh..." I whistle in admiration

The swing was surprisingly smooth and balanced. More so than the short sword I picked out as a backup. I inspect it closer again. The weigh distribution seems to be too purposeful for it to be just used as a walking stick or a staff.

Then I see it. It was so faint that I barely made it out after I reinforced mana into my eyes; even then, I was only able to spot it because I was looking for it.

Even more faint than the indentation markings over the pole, was a small line that seemed to separate two parts of the stick.

""

This was a sword!

I quickly try to pull the sword out of its sheathe, but it wouldn't budge.

"Hrrgghhh!" Even with my body reinforced with mana, I wasn't able to pull the sword out.

Don't tell me this was some sort of Excalibur that I had to be worthy of...

Next, I infuse my fire attribute mana into the sword, but still, no use.

"Grrrraaah!"

After 30 minutes, I realize that elemental attribute mana wasn't the answer.

...No way... what if...

I activate Dragon Will. I don't use its power but simply just infuse the Will into the sword.

Clink

Chapter 26 Worth Fighting For

Shiiiiiiiing

The sword unsheathes from the scabbard without any form of resistance to reveal the blade.

I can't help but gulp as I set my eyes on this masterwork too perfect to be called an ordinary sword.

The blade didn't seem like a katana to me, as it wasn't curved at all and was double-edged. In fact, I couldn't see the markings for where the edge was shaved down into a blade, as if this whole piece was one big edge while the tip curved into a sharp point towards the center of the blade. The shape was that of a very thin, very narrow sword that was weighted perfectly in my hand, but what made it breathtaking was the component and color.

It was a very light, translucent teal green color that almost seemed to generate a luster of its own. It was a stark contrast to the matte black sheathe and handle, making it appear all the more radiant. The whole blade was semitransparent as I could see my finger through the other side, making me question whether it was sturdy enough to be used.

I gulped once more. Even in my old world, I didn't wield something as perfect as this. What are the chances that I would find a sword meant for Beast Tamers in the back alley of this storage place?

Looking at Sylvie, I ask how she knew this was special.

'I don't know~ I just thought it was pretty!' was what she said while she kyu'd, tilting her little head.

Taking a closer look at the blade, I can see a small engraving near the grip.

"Dawn's Ballad W.K. IV"

As soon as I muttered that name, my right hand that was gripping the sword burned, making me reflexively let go of the sword.

I look down to see that I had a gash across my palm while blood was stained on the handle.

"Kuu!" 'Are you okay Papa?' Sylvie trotted next to me, pawing my leg, concerned.

I recall that some extraordinarily valuable staffs and wands had the ability to bond with a single user, allowing better manipulation of mana between the weapon and master, but I've never heard of a sword doing that.

Picking up the sword, I ponder over the man who's initial was W.K. IV, when I notice that the blade shrank in length a little. After a couple swings, I was in awe of how optimal the size was for my body's physique as of now.

Who was W.K. and how was he capable of forging such a sword?

I realize how much time has passed when I hear my father's faint voice calling for me. Quickly sheathing my new sword, I run back to where my father was, Sylvie hitching a ride on top of my head. On the way back, I made sure to pick up the short sword I chose for back up.

"Did you see anything you liked?" Vincent, who was next to my father, asked.

I nodded, holding up the short sword to him, "I found this sword and after a couple of swings, I really liked it. Can I take this one?"

Vincent takes the sword from my hand, drawing the sword from its scabbard. "Hmmm, not the best quality sword but it is solid and won't break easily. Rey, what do you think?"

My father takes a hold of the sword and takes a couple of swings. "The balance is not the best but I think it'll be good enough. What's that stick your holding though?"

I just shrug, trying to not make a big deal out of it. "Uncle Vincent, I found this really sturdy stick in the way back! Do you mind if I also take this back home to practice with?"

"Ah that old thing! I remember one of my merchants telling me how some shady old

man just gave it to him, mumbling something about finding its master. We got a couple of our inspectors to check if there's anything special about it, but it's just a sturdy, hard cane. It's been gathering dust here so if you think it'll do you some good, go ahead and take it." Vincent puts a hand on my shoulder.

Success!

****Kingdom of Elenoir****

TESSIA ERALITH'S POV:

"Haaaaaaaaaaa..." I let out an exaggerated sigh as I lean my head in the palm of both hands, looking out the window from my room.

I can't help but be annoyed. How dare he! Stupid Art!

I kick the wall in frustration.

"Ouch!" Stupid Art! This was his fault too!

I'm cradling my aching foot as I feel tears well up in my eyes.

I just got back from Elder Rinia's house. I had to guilt trip her into letting me spy... I mean make sure Art was doing okay.

I guess I should be happy that he's with his family and everything but doesn't he miss me? He looks too happy! And who's that girl!? Isn't Art a little bit TOO nice to her? He's even teaching that seductress how to manipulate mana! He didn't even bother teaching me!

That Arthur... When I get my hands on him, I'm going to give him a piece of my... sigh... who am I kidding, I just want to see him.

It's been a couple of months since he left but after getting used to seeing him every day, it feels like years. Maybe I should've treated him more nicely while he was here.

I cringe as I remember all of the times I physically abused him.

But that's not my fault! It's his fault for being such a thickheaded idiot!

Mama and Papa were happy Feyrith, the noble brat who messed with Art, and his sister were able to place in the top 5 during the competition, but I couldn't care less. It was just a show to show off our strength to the humans and dwarves anyway.

Grandpa said that the actual Continental Tournament (That's what the humans decided to call it) would happen every 5 years from now on. Does that mean that would be the next time I would be able to see Art? I have to wait a whole 5 years?

"Uuu..." This sucks. The only thing that keeps my mind off of Art is training. My goal is to become stronger than Arthur. The next time we meet, I want to surprise him by how much I've grown. Maybe then he'll see me in a different light.

Stupid Arthur... Even though he's younger than me, he treats me like a kid.

Even though I'm the older one...

I hold up the water filled orb that Elder Rinia made for me as a present. She was able to capture a scene and integrate it into the orb of water so that it constantly showed Arthur's face.

"Uu... Dummy" I can't help but pout as I poke the cheek of Arthur's image.

THUMP "Young one, I have good..."

"Eeek! GRANDPA! What did I say about knocking?!" I quickly try to hide the orb behind me but Grandpa just gives me a sly grin.

"I see you're using that orb well kukuku."

"STUPID GRANDPA!!!!" I can feel my cheeks and ears turn bright red.

"BAHAHAHA! Don't mind don't mind! I would rather enjoy having Arthur as a grandson-in-law anyhow! But isn't it a little too early for that now?" He keeps teasing.

I just turn away from Grandpa, trying to hide my embarrassment, not knowing how to respond to his teasing.

"Don't pout now! I got some good news for you little one." I turn my head slightly just

to notify him that I was listening.

"Hahaha! Now... what if I said that you can have the chance to attend the same school that Arthur will be attending later on?"

Swish

My body spins back towards Grandpa instantly before he even finished speaking.

"Really Grandpa?! Uuu... You're not lying to me right?" I grab Grandpa's sleeve and tug it hard.

"Kukuku... Did you tell her, Father?" I see Mama and Papa come into the room, smiling.

I turn to them, "Mama! Papa! Is it true? I can go to school with Arthur?"

"Haha~ calm down Tess." My mother sits beside me, patting my head.

"Your Grandfather has close ties with the current Director of Xyrus Academy. He got in contact with her recently and she was excitedly telling your Grandfather about how there will be a genius Quadra-Elemental Augmenter attending her school in three years' time." My father adds in.

Grandpa just laughs, "BAHAHAHA who else besides Arthur is a Quadra-Elemental Augmenter! I instantly knew, but of course I didn't say anything about me training him. Fufu \sim I plan on surprising her with that later on."

"Why is he waiting 3 years before going to school? Isn't he more than fit to go now?" I ask, but my excitement keeps me from hiding my smile.

"She said something about him wanting to be an Adventurer." Grandpa just says.

Mother holds my hand and gives me a smile, "The important part is that, this gives us enough time. We're currently still trying to negotiate terms to have a trial run for the integration of the younger generation of the elves and dwarves to attend Xyrus Academy. The King of Sapin agreed that the only way to start mending our relationship was by allowing the younger generation to form bonds with each other."

"Little one, you better train hard! Arthur chose to become an Adventurer before going to school to get some real experience in fighting as well as go to school at a more

normal age to try and fit in with his peers. He's going to be popular, so if you don't snatch, some other lucky girl will." Grandpa shoots me an evil wink.

"Father, I think that's enough of teasing Tess now. Look, she's about to cry!" My father just shakes his head helplessly. I could tell my father has mixed feelings about his precious daughter being taken away from him.

****Kingdom of Sapin****

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

The whole Helstea house is decorated as Vincent and his family as well as my own family and the Twin Horns congratulate me on finally turning 9.

"Thank you all for taking care of me until now!" I give a deep bow as Sylvie copies me, bowing her small head.

The dinner was amazing as the chefs went all out tonight. My mother made sure to include some of my favorite dishes, some of which she made herself.

The table was pleasantly loud, as Adam made loud jokes and made fun of some of the members with their embarrassing moments while exploring the dungeon.

"Adam, you seem to forget the time when a horned mole snuck up under you while you were taking a piss in the dungeon. As I recall, you got so scared you landed straight on your back, peeing on yourself like a fountain." Jasmine coolly said while she was sipping her tea, not even bothering to look at the petrified Adam

"PFFFT! I spit out my food as I try to control my laughter." My father just straight up laughed at him while pointing his finger, almost falling off his chair. Even Vincent was holding in his belly to try and keep from laughing.

"NOOOO!! Y-You!! I thought no one was awake when that happened?!" Adam's face turned ghostly pale and his shoulders slump at his utter defeat while the women were just shaking their heads in embarrassment at the male's behavior.

All in all, everyone was having a great time. Ellie chimed in, telling us about her adventures in learning how to read and write, trying to be a part of the grown up conversations as well, while Lilia just giggled and agreed.

After dinner, everyone migrated to the living room where the fireplace was.

"Happy Birthday again, Son. This present is from your mother and I, and of course Ellie as well." My father handed me a package wrapped in cloth while Mother was holding back Ellie who was trying to unwrap the present herself.

Opening it, I see a fingerless glove meant only for my left hand. It was black and simple but embedded on the top of the glove were 3 white stones.

"Your father hunted the material for the glove and I imbued my healing spells unto those three white stones. Each of the stones carries a single use spell. I'm sure it'll be useful to have some safety measures while you go out on missions." My mother looks at me with sad smile. I can tell she still wasn't ready to send me off.

"Thanks Mom, Dad, Ellie, I love it. This'll be really useful for me." I give each of my family members a big hug. Putting on the glove, I could tell how sturdy the material was, not to mention that the three healing spells would be extremely useful in a tight situation.

"Ahem! Next is us!" Vincent pulls out a small. He dramatically gets down on one knee and opens the box. Inside the box were two silver rings, one plain, and one with a small clear gem.

""

Uhh... Where is he going with this?

"Honey! Stop teasing the boy!" Tabitha smacks Vincent's shoulder while he holds in his laughter.

"Okay, okay! Arthur, this is more of a present for your family than you but I'm sure you'll appreciate it as well."

"This ring" Vincent pulls out the plain ring, "Is what you will be wearing, while this ring," He hands the gemmed ring to my mother, "Is what your mother will be wearing."

Tabitha continues on for him, "Alice, while Arthur is wearing the ring, you'll be able to tell whether he's okay or not. The plain ring is able to keep tabs on the mana circulation that naturally flows in a mage's body. If the natural mana flow stops, the ring you're holding, Alice, will glow red and emit a high pitched sound."

"We thought really hard on what Arthur may need during his time as an Adventurer but Lilia was actually the one that brought up the possibility of giving a present that'll help him and his family. Unfortunately, the rings can't do much more than that but I thought this will bring you some peace of mind Alice, Rey." Vincent shrugs his shoulders.

My mother tears up while clutching unto the ring. "Oh Tabitha, Lilia, thank you!" She hugs the both of them in a tight embrace. "Thank you Vincent," She gives Vincent a deep bow while he was shaking his hands, saying how this was nothing much.

I couldn't help but smile, looking at my mother.

If this ring can free my family from constantly worrying about me, then this was the best gift I could ask for, but there was worry in my mind at the psychological presence wearing the ring would have on my mother; she'd be constantly checking it.

"Well how are we going to beat that guys?" Adam chimes in. My guardian angel Durden walks towards me, handing me a roll of parchment

"You see, we also thought along the same lines as the Helstea family. We couldn't really think of what to give the little monster so we decided on this!" Adam waves his arm in a dramatic manner.

"Those two scrolls are sound transmission scrolls! I'm not going to elaborate on how expensive this was, because it was EXTREMELY expen... OUCH!" Jasmine smacks Adam on the head.

"Cough! Anyways! With this, you now have a one-time source of communication. Just infuse mana into the scroll Arthur, and you'll be able to send a message to the other scroll. After the holder of the other scroll receives it, Mama Leywin, she can then send the reply! After the reply is sent and the other person listens to it, the parchment will then turn to ashes! TADA! You're welcome!" Adam gives a dramatic bow.

The members of the Twin Horns were all taking turns smacking Adam's egotistical performance but they give my family a warm smile.

I could tell my mother and father's moods turn a whole lot better knowing that they won't be sending their son off to who knows where without knowing how he was doing and what would become of him.

I give each of the Twin Horns and the Helstea family a hug, thanking them for the presents. Lilia turned beet red while Tabitha just giggled at her.

Honestly, I already had what I needed, but the ring and scroll will be an invaluable source of comfort for my family, which I was worried about the most.

Soon after, my parent's ex party members all left to go back to their inn. The Helstea family went back upstairs when Lilia started dozing off, tired from the long day, leaving me with just my parents. Ellie was asleep while cuddling the snoring Sylvie. I was already all packed up, prepared to leave tomorrow morning; meeting up with Jasmine in front of the house. Tonight would be the last chance to have a real talk before I leave.

"Tomorrow is the big day Son. Are you excited?" My father clasped my shoulders. My father's eyes were a little red as I could see him holding back some tears.

My mother didn't fight her emotions and just gave me a big hug while crying.

"I'll be fine Mom, Dad. I promise I'll try to be back home every chance I get. If anything happens, you'll be able to know."

After talking about my life and the dangers of an Adventurer, my parents ushered me back into my room. I plopped into bed and stared at the ceiling, Sylvie asleep next to me. I had family and now, I had people who loved me. I had people that cared about me for who I am, not for the position I had. It's a nice feeling and I don't want to give it up. I'll fight for it and make sure to treasure this emotion that I was devoid of in my previous world. For that, I need to better myself. More so than when I was a King.

Chapter 27

Examination

"Crying won't work! Shouldn't you be used to water by now Sylv?"

"Kyuuuuu..." Sylvie finally escapes from my grasp and flees out of the shower, still wet.

"Haa..." I shake my head as I finish washing up.

Wearing nothing but a simple T-shirt and pants, I take one last look at the room I was living in for the past couple of months. I put on my glove and ring, packing the coat and mask along with a few other necessities into my bag. I strap on Dawn's Ballad and my short sword, both on the back of my waist where I was most used to before walking out.

"Trust in Jasmine when things get rough. She may be the youngest but don't doubt her strength and experience as an Adventurer." My father advises while giving me one last firm hug.

"Why are Brother and Sylviee leaving? No! Stay here!" My sister was now struck with realization that I wouldn't be home for a while. She was bear hugging my waist and refused to let go.

"Honey, your brother will be back okay?" My mother tries to console her.

"NONONONONO! Stay!!" My sister wasn't listening anymore and starts shouting while crying.

I kneel down and give her a big hug.

"Can you protect Mom and Dad while I'm gone for a bit Ellie? You're a big girl now right?"

"UUuuu... hic... I can protect them..." I wipe the tears streaming down her face.

"Atta girl. Your big brother is going to be gone for a little bit but I'll be back. I feel a lot

better that we have someone strong like my little sister here to protect the house."

"Eng!" Her eyes still filled with tears, she looks at me with a look filled with determination.

Patting her head, I give Mother and Father a hug. "We'll miss you. Don't forget to keep the ring on your finger okay?" My mother squeezes me tightly.

"Stay safe and know your limits Arthur." My father gives me one last advice.

Know my limits.

I walk down the front stairs to where Jasmine was waiting.

I wave at them one last time, my sister waving both her hands while she was biting her lips to keep from crying.

"Let's go Jasmine." I say while putting on the mask and coat.

She nods as we head downtown to the Adventurer's Guild Hall.



The Guild Hall was not what I expected it to be. A place filled with thugs seated around wooden tables downing beer was what I imagined inside my head. Instead, it was a marble structure with an intricately designed interior. There were tables made from metal where I could see other Adventurers giving us a passing glance. The whole place had a luxury hotel-like décor that didn't suit some of the more barbarian-looking Adventurers here but I just kept walking.

"Welcome! How can I help you two?" The front lady gives me a professional smile.

Before I say anything, I see Jasmine slide something towards the clerk lady.

"I would like to sponsor him to take a rank examination." Her face remains expressionless as she says this.

"Y-yes! I understand." Nodding several times before handing back whatever Jasmine passed to her.

"Please, come over this way." She guides us towards the back door

Murmur *murmur*

"Oy, there's someone taking a rank examination." I hear whispers around us from the Adventurers seated.

I keep my questions to myself for now as we follow the clerk. Passing through the door, we're inside a small room with two couches facing each other. On the far end of the room is a desk facing the door with a slender man seated, his head down.

"Hmm?"

The man looks up revealing an angular face. The man had black hair parted down the center that reached his shoulders. His glasses were thick and frameless, giving his narrow eyes an even sharper look.

The clerk next to us gives the man a deep bow before explaining, "A Class Adventurer Jasmine Flamesworth has requested this err... gentleman to take the rank examination."

"Ah! Miss Flamesworth. How are you doing these days? I met with your father not too long ago..." The slender man gets up from his desk, walking towards us.

I turn to look at Jasmine as she gives him a silent, curt bow. I raise an eyebrow when I notice that her fists are clenched at the mention of her father.

"Cough... Anyway, it is a pleasure to meet you! My name is Kaspian Bladeheart and I am in charge of this branch. You must be a friend of Miss Flamesworth. Is there a name I can address you by?" He casts his studying gaze at the masked figure that had a small reptilian kitten on his head.

"Kuu!" Sylvie answers for me.

I made Sylvie go into her original form during my time as an Adventurer, so her horns protruded out more and her red spikes were visible.

"Please just call me Note." This was the identity I was going to go by from now on. I got the idea from looking at my mask. The blue streak that went through the left eye slit reminded me of a single half note. Kaspian does a quick double take when he noticed Sylvie, but other than that, he doesn't mind the small beast on my head. Seeing mana beasts doesn't seem to surprise him because of his line of work. "Yes! Well... Sir Note, we will proceed with Miss Flamesworth here as your sponsor. Do you know how this will work?"

Shaking my head, I let him explain. "An Adventurer of B class or higher has the power to sponsor a new Adventurer to an examination. Depending on how well you do, this exam will give you the opportunity to be placed into a suitable rank. The rank exam will consist of only a practical portion. Now, judging by your weapons, I can assume that you are a Fighter or Augmenter yes?" He looks quizzically at the black stick tied to my waist below my short sword.

"Yes."

"Okay! Usually there would be a quick application along with an inspection of your mana core before the exam but since it is Miss Flamesworth here sponsoring you, I will just waive that. Mary, take these two to the examination hall." He ushers us towards another door.

"Y-yes! Please, Mr. Note, Miss Flamesworth, right this way."

I look at Jasmine through my mask as we walk through a long corridor. Is this why she wanted to be the one to follow me? What was the Flamesworth house?

I squint as my eyes try to adjust to the brightness change from the dark passage. We were inside a brightly lit, indoor, dirt-floored coliseum. The seats were just exaggerated stairs that were mostly empty except for around 10 people sitting in random spots. On the stage at the bottom were two Augmenters fighting.

"Please follow me to your seats. There are a couple other exam takers today so please stay seated around here until the examiner calls your name." The clerk gave us one last bow before walking back down the rows of stone seats.

I lean forward after I put Sylvie down between to Jasmine and I. Jasmine just leans back with her arms crossed.

"Haa!" A large mage with a shaved head swinging the polearm was at a disadvantage as the opponent he was versing, a man of average build and short black hair and a scar down his cheek, was easily dodging all of the clumsy swings.

The scarred man looked bored, as he didn't even bother using the broadsword he had in his right hand.

"Take this!" Daring to announce his next attack meant he was either confident or he was just an amateur. In this case, it looked to be the latter.

The polearm he held high above his head suddenly glowed a dim orange as a heat wave surrounded his weapon.

The scarred man raised an eyebrow in slight surprise but otherwise remained the same.

"Hell Smash!" He bellowed as he swung down. Just like how Conjurers chant spells to focus their intent, many Augmenters also choose to do something similar, like vocalizing the name of their move. However, for such a simple move, it seemed unnecessary.

Shaking his head, the scarred man held up his broadsword.

CLANG

The polearm was flung up into the air as the shocked examinee just looked at his empty hands.

"Your skills as a polearm wielder is nonexistent and your battle senses are lousy... and that's me being nice. You depend too much on physical strength compared to your mana reinforcement, throwing your attack's balance off. It says your age is 35 but you're now only at the dark orange stage. I would normally put someone of your caliber at E class but seeing how you have a fire affinity, if that little heater move you just did can even be called fire, I'll pass you as a D class... barely.

I nod in agreement at the scarred examiner's assessment.

"NEXT! DIANE WHITEHALL!" The man bellows as the bald man dispiritingly walks back up into the rows of seats, picking up his polearm along the way.

"Yes! Coming!" A woman on the other side of the stadium hurries down from the seats, almost stumbling along the way.

She was a freckled girl that looked to be well into her teens. She had her curly brown

hair tied back and was wearing the standard conjurer's robe. She fumbled with her wand, almost dropping it while trying to get it out from her robe pocket.

I hear snickers and giggles around the stadium from the scarce audience.

"Pfft! This should be good!" I look to my left at the sound of the voice, to see a boy laughing and pointing at the girl down at the stage.

He didn't look much older than me, which surprised me. His attire was that of a noble's. He had medium length blond hair that covered his forehead and ears with dull green eyes. I had to admit he was a good-looking boy, and by his cocky demeanor, I'm sure he knew that too. By his side was a white wooden staff that was taller than him. Embedded at the very top of the staff was a large ruby colored gem.

I just turn my head back towards the stage.

The scarred examiner was sitting down at the stage while a woman wearing the typical oversized hat used by many Conjurers in the shape of a pointed sun hat, replaced him. It didn't surprise me that there were separate instructors for each type of mage.

The pale instructor with small, thin eyes wearing a yellow conjurer's robe that matched her hat coughed to get the audience to quiet down.

"Ahem! Diane Whitehall, age 18, a Conjurer at the light orange stage with a single specialization in water. Let us begin." She threw the notepad towards the scarred examiner and held up her grey staff.

Once a Conjurer reached the orange stage, almost everyone chose to focus solely on the element they were best at instead of wasting time trying to be adept at all 4 elements. Single specialization, in her case, meant that she only focused on water spells. Dual specialization and up, there would be a strict test to see if you really are adept at both elements.

Instantly, the freckled examinee murmurs a spell and a bubble of water surrounds her.

The basics of battling as a Conjurer is setting up a defensive spell. They do this since most don't have the ability to reinforce their body with mana.

She had the fundamentals down at least.

The examiner, however, doesn't cast a defensive spell but instead chooses to go on the offensive.

"Sandstorm!" The pale examiner shouts as a gale of sand forms around the freckled girl and her water bubble.

The sand mixes in with the water and a bit after it's turned into mud.

"Release!" The now mud bubble bursts as the examinee cancels her spell. Jumping back, she muttered another spell while a pressured ball of water was forming on the tip of her wand.

"Aqua cannon!" She yells as the ball of water shoots out in a blazing speed towards the examiner.

The examiner catches me by surprise as she quickly dodges the water ball instead of blocking it with a spell. Thinking back, this was the first time watching a fight between two Conjurers. This fight would be a good way to see how Conjurers fight compared to Augmenters.

"BURST!" The freckled teen screams while she swings her wand down.

BOOM

The noble boy that oddly reminds me of Feyfey from the elf Kingdom leans forward, intensely watching the fight. I could tell that he was a little surprised by the clumsy girl's skills.

I turned to Jasmine. "She's not bad." She mumbles to me.

The stadium is covered in a small dust cloud that covered the instructor from view.

The dust soon clears up to reveal that no one was there.

Suddenly, the examiner pops up from the ground behind Diane and her staff lightly thumps the top of the examinee's head.

"EEK!" Diane jumps forward in surprise.

"I must say... your control is quite decent Miss Whitehall. You were a little overconfident

in your last spell, not preparing any defensive measures, but overall, the efficiency in mana control and cast speed was good. C class!"

Diane gives a sigh of relief. Being a C class Adventurer at her age is a feat she can be proud of.

"Next! Elijah Knight!" The Conjurer examiner announces

"Here..." A couple rows away to my right, a boy that looked even younger than the blonde noble, stood up. He looked like a very serious lad, with short trim jet-black hair that came down to cover half of his forehead. He wore a very serious expression underneath his framed glasses that made him look more mature than his actual age. He wore a simple beige long sleeve and black pants and didn't have any sort of weapons on him. I half expected him to be an Augmenter but by the fact that the examiner didn't switch out meant otherwise.

Suddenly a clerk runs up to the examiner and whispers something inaudible to her ear.

The pale-faced examiner's thin eyes widen before she quickly regains her composure

"Elijah Knight, age 10... Ahem. I was just notified of your special status. As of now, you are a B class Adventurer."

B class at his age and he didn't even need to get tested?

I could see looks of disbelief on everyone's face. Even the Augmenter examiner's face was in surprise.

The serious boy just bows and sits back down.

"Next! Lucas Wykes!" She continues.

"Hmph! Guess it's finally my turn!" He jumps up from his seated position and leisurely walks down to the stage.

The examiner looks down at her notes but except this time, her voice sounds evidently surprised. "Lucas Wykes, 11 years old. Conjurer at the... d-dark yellow stage! Single Specialization in fire."

What? He's already at the dark yellow stage? How is that even possible?

"At your service!" Lucas takes an exaggerated bow.

"Yes, let us begin." The examiner stutters.

With a serious face, Lucas instantly jumps back while muttering a spell. "Arise, Flame Guardian!"

A pillar of fire shoots up in front of him, diminishing to reveal a 2-meter tall humanoid made of flames.

I can faintly hear the scarred Augmenter examiner whistle in awe.

The flame guardian dashes towards the examiner while I hear Lucas cast another spell.

So he does have some skill to back up his ego.

The Conjurer examiner raises an eyebrow in surprise while muttering a spell.

"Earth's Tomb!"

Boom

A solid cube instantly traps the fire guardian in his tracks.

Good plan. The flame guardian will naturally disappear once it uses up the limited amount of oxygen inside the tomb.

Lucas is smiling though, as he bellows, "It's too late! Ember Wisps!"

The ruby stone embedded on his staff glows a dazzling orange as a spark shoots up in the air. The spark explodes like a firework, separating into dozens of small floating tendrils of fire. The tendrils stay afloat all around the stage, surrounding the both of them.

"The boy is good." I hear Jasmine give a rare nod of approval.

The examiner's face turns serious now.

I was a little confused as to what those floating embers were for but my question was soon answered.

"Expulsion!" He raised his staff above his head while he was still dashing backwards.

Suddenly, the dozens of fire tendrils glowed then shot out beams of fire at the examiner.

"Stone Shard Field!" The examiner points her staff down at the ground. The area around her glows a bright yellow before multiple pieces of earth shoot up from the ground. The rocks move in formation to block the lasers of flame. Only, it doesn't just block the lasers but redirects it towards Lucas.

"Release!" Lucas screams as he pales. The wisps in the air disappear but the flames that were already shot are still heading towards his direction.

Pointing his huge staff at the multiple trails of flames heading his way, he shouts, "Fire Twister!"

A cyclone of fire just big enough to surround him appears from the ground. The trails of flame spin around the small fire tornado, fusing into it.

"Pierce." The examiner mutters softly. The rock shards that redirected the flames now shoot forward towards the flame tornado Lucas was inside of. The large shards of rock go through the fire tornado and dissipating it, stopping just before they squish Lucas into fine paste.

The blonde noble just falls to his knees in defeat, sweating from the exhaustion from using so much mana.

The rocks around Lucas crumble and fall as the examiner releases her spell.

"Your control and creativity in the combinations of your spells are superb. You have a great future Mr. Wykes. Your control over mana consumption needs a bit more control but I look forward to see what you can become capable of. I think I can just barely pass you as a B class!" She announces, giving him a smile.

"WOAH!" "Another little monster!" "Gah! I want to just go home!" "What is with today's crowd?"

I hear some of the audience members that have already taken the exam murmur

excitedly amongst their peers.

"It's only natural!" Lucas gets up from the ground, dusting his robe while he tries to keep a poker face but it's pretty evident that he's excited.

He gets back to his seat before the examiner, who wasn't even tired, switches places with the Augmenter examiner.

The scarred man gets up, stretching his body. I see him high five the other examiner and looks at his notes.

"Next examinee, Note! Please come down!" He bellows.

Jasmine puts a hand on my shoulder. "Good luck."

I nod back and walk down, leaving Sylvie with Jasmine.

"It seems you're here to be tested under special conditions, seeing as there is no information here written about you. Okay! Let's see what you're made of." He gives me a curious stare, trying to look through my mask's eye slit to see who I was.

Just as he's about to unsheathe his sword, a voice interrupts him

"I'll be the one to test this particular examinee, George."

Turning my head, I see the thin, bespectacled man named Kaspian walk towards us from the corridor I came in from.

"S-sir? You will be personally examining this participant? I apologize if this sounds presumptuous but is there really a need for an AA class to lower himself to test an examinee?

The scarred examiner is visibly baffled by the fact that Kaspian will be the one to test me.

An AA class! The difference in levels grows bigger as the ranks get higher. Being an AA class Adventurer signifies that you have the strength of ten A class Adventurers, and that's just a rough estimate.

He should be one of the pinnacles of strength amongst humans. Even Gramps would

be considered only AA class after going into his second beast form.

"His sponsor has deep ties with me so I feel obligated to test him personally." He chuckles as his right hand reaches towards a thin rapier on his waist.

"Let us begin."

Chapter 28 Changes In Dicathen

I unsheathe the short sword and hold it in front of me with one hand. The various sounds around the coliseum are soon drowned out as I focus solely on the opponent in front of me.

He's making figure eights with his rapier while his left hand is in his pocket. Yet, he has no openings. He's not even trying to hide his killing intent while he's smiling innocently at me. My mind flashes back to my old world's dueling arena. I didn't think I'd find someone like him so soon, someone capable of making me excited. This should be different from sparring with Gramps.

"Please prepare yourself. I wouldn't want the person Miss Flamesworth is sponsoring to lose too quickly."

He blinks and instantly closes the gap as his rapier cuts a few pieces of hair above my left ear.

"Nice dodge." He winks as he recoils his rapier, preparing for his next move.

Clang

I block his second thrust with the end of my handle, using the momentum to spin my body.

Kaspian leans back, dodging my swing but a small cut appears across the tip of his nose.

He looks surprised for a bit but instantly regains focus. Not giving him a chance to fully recover, I follow up with a roundhouse kick to his leg.

BOOM

His sheath stops the force of my reinforced kick. In that split second, he was able to use his other hand to reposition his sheath to block my attack.

The force of my kick to his sheath creates a small dust cloud around us and he uses that opportunity to gain distance.

"I must apologize for underestimating you. I shall be a bit more serious now."

His innocent gaze gleams a bit with murderous intent as his rapier glows with a silvery hue.

He lunges at the air in front of him and all of a sudden I'm hit in the arm with something hard.

"You managed to partly dodge that as well. Seems like Miss Flamesworth has picked up someone worthwhile."

I look down to see a gash in my left arm.

He was aiming for my heart! I only managed to dodge on pure instinct. He's releasing too much of his killing intent. Is he doing it on purpose?

I curse at my body. Every time I fight, I still can't help but feel restricted.

He lunges his rapier two more times, but I know what's coming.

Fwoosh *Fwoosh*

He's creating spears of wind with his thrusts. The difficulty in dodging it comes from the spears being close to invisible. I'll have to rely on sound and timing to dodge, but I have to decrease the distance between us while doing so.

He had the advantage of a longer reach and a much bigger mana supply than me. In this body, I'm not confident enough to even say that I have the advantage in terms of technique. My body just doesn't listen to me as well as I want it to. The only advantage I could think of was my body being a lot tougher than his thanks to assimilating with Sylvia's Dragon Will.

I dodge one spear of wind while the other one lightly grazes my right arm as I close the distance between us.

It's evident that both of our sword techniques consist of speed and agility.

I embed my shortsword in fire, releasing an arc of flames with my swing.

With a simple swing of his rapier, a gust of wind blows the fire away, but that's what I wanted him to do.

Flicker Step.

A technique focusing fire affinity mana into the sole of your foot in rapid succession, gaining instantaneous acceleration.

I arrive in front of him while his rapier is still swung up next to his shoulder.

His brows rise in surprise as I use my free hand to push his hand up so he can't swing down his rapier.

He will just blow flames away so I coat my sword to an extremely high temperature.

Superheat.

"Vortex."

Suddenly the momentum from my flicker step is thrown off and a force pushes me into the ground.

I jump back to gain distance and see that there's an intense swirl of airstream coming out of him that's strong enough to create cracks on the ground around him.

He widens his stance, recoiling his rapier back with his left hand stretched out, resting on the blade.

"Heaven's Rain"

His arm and rapier turns into a faint blur as he produces a succession of countless thrusts.

This was an exam right? Is he actually trying to kill me?

Fuck it.

"Thunderclap Impulse."

One of the few techniques I managed to develop while training with Grandpa. A technique using lightning affinity mana to run currents of electricity throughout my nerves, quickening my reflexes a couple times over. If the average human has a reaction time of around 0.3 seconds, there are trained fighters that can get it down to 0.2 or even 0.15 seconds.

With Thunderclap Impulse, I can quicken my reaction time to 0.05 for a short period of time.

My pupils contract and the hairs on my skin stand up on end due to the electricity.

I can hear the spears of wind shooting towards me as I prepare to dodge them.

"Release!"

His skill dissipates and my hair is just blown by a small draft.

Releasing my skill as well, I look at him quizzically. Before I had the chance to ask him, Jasmine is already by my side, staring daggers at Kaspian with her two blades in her hands.

"I may have gotten a little carried away." He just shrugs nonchalantly.

"It seems you wish to hide much of your ability. I can only imply that you wish to be placed at a lower rank. Note. B class."

Before walking off, he stops in front of the corridor. "I assume you have no problem with this?" He turns his head a little to look at me.

I just nod in agreement and he disappears from sight walking down the hall.

"That is the last examination for today! Please go to the front desk to receive your Adventurer's card. Everyone is dismissed." The Augmenter examiner shouts before he and the other examiner both rush after Kaspian.

KASPIAN BLADEHEART'S POV:

I arrive to my desk and before I even have the chance to take a seat, the two Adventurers

in charge of today's exams bombard me with questions simultaneously

"Sigh... George, Emily, take a seat and don't talk all at once." I sit down and lean back.

"Sir! What was with today's examinees? Three B class Adventurers right off the bat in a day? This kind of situation is unheard of. Not to mention that two of them were kids! Dark yellow at the age of 11... Has that ever occurred amongst humans?" Emily nods fervidly in agreement.

"Do you remember what happened half a year ago here in Xyrus?" I throw them a question.

"Around 6 months ago was the first tournament that was held for all three races right?" Emily answers.

"Correct. The Adventurer guild workers will all know soon so there isn't much of a point in hiding this. I was just notified of this a couple of weeks ago as well. The ban on elves and dwarves becoming Adventurers has been lifted and today's batch included some of the representative examinees."

"S-sir, do you mean to say that all three of them are either dwarves or elves then?" George's jaw is slack as he's saying this.

I pull out a small file of papers from my desk.

"Lucas Wykes is a half elf that has been residing in the Kingdom of Sapin. The information on his birth is classified but if I had to guess, he was probably a product of an elf slave. The Wykes family has always had a bad reputation for dabbling in nefarious ways to create better mages for their house. He's an unusual case though, being able to be so adept in flame affinity, despite his elf lineage. He awakened at the age of 8, which is fast even amongst elf standards and was sent here for a sort of trial run. The Wykes no doubt expended a lot of money into buying beast cores and other supplements to quicken his growth." I flip to the next page.

"Elijah Knight. He's quite the mystery. According to the file, his origin is unknown. He was, however, raised amongst dwarves since a young age. He was sent as one of the first representatives from the Kingdom of Darv to assimilate into the human kingdom.

"How come he wasn't tested Sir? The clerk only told me to just put him into B class." Emily leaned forward from her seat.

"Elijah awakened a couple of months ago, so he's only now barely reached the Dark Red stage. As for why he was allowed to be a B class Adventurer probably has to do with the person backing him up. I don't have any say in his case so we can only let him be. I'm curious as to what his abilities are." I shake my head.

"As for that masked Augmenter from today, to be honest, I have no idea who he is. He wasn't recorded as one of the representatives on the list. I was simply curious as to what kind of person Miss Flameheart would be willing to sponsor.

"Flameheart... as in THAT Flameheart house right? The famous house that is known for birthing the strongest fire attribute mages?"

I put away the file and look at them seriously, adjusting my glasses. "I told you all of this because you will find out soon anyway. However, I trust that you guys will refrain from telling others until the announcement is made across the country."

I dismiss them as soon as I receive confirmation that they'll comply.

I ponder over today's events. That masked Augmenter. His techniques were not the standard skills that most fire attribute mages use. Even his style with the sword, it was something that made me shiver. But somehow, I get the feeling that he wasn't at his optimal state. That somehow, he was being restrained. I couldn't quite place my finger on it but his movements were awkward at times, as if he wasn't used to his own body.

I dismiss my thoughts and start going over the pile of documents.

I can't help but grin to myself. This continent is changing. There will be a lot interesting events happening from now on.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

The same clerk that led us to the examination site hands me my bronze-colored Adventurer's card at the front desk.

From E class to B class, the card is a copper color, where starting from A class, it'll change to silver, then gold for AA class, then white for S class.

"Do you have a close relationship with Kaspian, Jasmine?" I ask after putting away my

card, Sylvie asleep on my head.

"He's an acquaintance of my father." She says simply under a cold expression.

I don't dig for any further answers. She obviously doesn't have any sort of positive feelings about all of this.

Changing the subject, I ask Jasmine, "So what should we do next?"

She ponders for a bit. There were several options. We could do missions that were at or below our rank. These missions included a variety of tasks, from guarding, to acquiring specific items. We could also transport ourselves to the Beast Glades and explore while hunting down mana beasts.

"Dungeon exploring." She answers, a soft smile on her face.

Chapter 29 Sword and Body

Sylvie lets out a 'kyu' in excitement at the idea of exploring a dungeon but I stay silent, looking at the two swords strapped to the back of my waist.

Today's battle with Kaspian confirmed a lot of things for me. I've spent too much time adjusting to and learning this world's magic system. Assimilating with Sylvia's Beast Will, honing my Lightning and Ice Attribute techniques along with all of the other elements. I was so engrossed in the fact that this world made it capable to produce physical manifestations of elements that I neglected my foundations, the very thing I was best at, which was my body. In my past life, I used the simplest techniques to utilize the most of my small ki pool and with just my sword; I was able to rise to the top. This world offers so many more possibilities but if I am to truly excel and become the best in this world, I'm going to have to not only use my gifts in this life, but my experiences from my previous life.

In the midst of my thoughts, I feel someone bump past my shoulder. Looking up, I see the blond boy named Lucas walk past me with his entourage of guards and servants.

"You're not bad for an Augmenter, but that's it. Don't get cocky because we happen to be in the same class. Even in the same ranks there are levels, and you would be at the bottom. Cheh! Know your place."

The blond boy just smirks while intentionally leaning his head back so he can look down on me. The fact that his height was a fair bit shorter than mine just made him look silly.

What a cliché behavior for an annoying side character.

Not even bothering to argue with him, I just face back to Jasmine, "Let's go to the portal."

Crossing through the teleportation gate, my senses jolt from the scenery. The City of Xyrus has the most teleportation gates among the cities since that's the only way you can enter into it, it being a floating city and all. The one we crossed led us directly to the front entrance of the area known as the Beast Glades.

Hearing the chirps of birds and occasional cries and roars of beasts, the constant sound of water flowing filling the background created a natural symphony. The sight of tall trees and numerous hills filled with different plants reminded me of anything but a dangerous landscape crowded with monsters that can kill even the strongest of mages. Only lower rank beasts inhabited the outskirts of the Beast Glades, where the natural resources were the least plentiful. The deeper you go in, the more mysterious the landscape turns into, with caves and hidden entrances to unexplored regions of the continent.

I take a deep breath, with Jasmine soon following up through the portal after Sylvie and me.

Suddenly, Sylvie hops off of my head and scurries off, as if chasing something.

Dumbfounded at this event, I just yell out, "Wait, Sylv! Where are you going?"

Sylvie just sends me a vague response, saying she wants to train too.

""

My pet dragon has never left my side ever since she hatched but she suddenly leaves? I was uneasy at first, but I realized after a bit that I could feel where she was.

"I think she will be fine. Mana beasts have a natural instinct to get stronger after a certain period of time. She must've felt very suffocated being in a sheltered environment all of her life." Jasmine says, walking next to me.

Putting her hand on my shoulder, she signals for us to start moving. "There is a place I wish to visit first before going to a dungeon. We have to hurry though; it gets a little more dangerous at night."

Willing mana into her body, Jasmine bolts off into the distance, with her wind attribute mana propelling her even faster.

I follow suit, forming two gales of wind below my feet before I dash after her. I made sure to keep tabs on Sylvie but it wouldn't be much of a problem since both she and I were mentally linked. Even as the distance grew between us, the connection remained strong and I was able to sense that Sylvie was catching small prey, her ecstatic mood affecting me as well.

The journey lasted a couple of hours and it was growing dark. The only reason I was able to keep up with Jasmine, even when she was a dark yellow stage, was thanks to the use of mana rotation throughout the way. This skill has become almost second nature to me now, and I use it unconsciously whenever I exert mana.

By late evening, we cleared through a dense forest and arrived at a small clearing. Surrounded by trees, there was a small field of grass with a stream of clear water flowing through it.

"We'll camp out here tonight and stay here for a few days." She announces while setting down her bag and taking out a couple of things.

"Were we not going to go into a dungeon right away?" I ask while I set down my bad as well.

She just shakes her head, picking up a few branches of wood and gathering them together.

I go into the forest, finding some decent sized branches to make a fire with. After a bit, we got a fire started. Making myself comfortable, I take my mask off now and sit by her next to the fire. We sat there, staring at the light produced by the flame and hearing the wood as it burns and cracks.

Trying to break the silence, I ask Jasmine, "What made you want to become an Adventurer?"

" "

Her gaze never leaves the fire and I just stare back at the flame, thinking she didn't want to answer.

After a couple of crackles of wood made by the fire, Jasmine answers softly, "I wanted to get away from my family."

"I see... Are you on bad terms with your family?" I respond, my eyes staying on the fire.

""

Crackle

"The Flamesworth House was a major contributor to the war against Elves. Our house has provided many powerful mages, both Conjurers and Augmenters. Our lineage in the fire attribute element is second to none. We took great pride in this, because fire is considered to be the most powerful of the elements." She stated.

This was the most Jasmine has talked in one sitting.

"But Jasmine, aren't you a..." I look up at, furrowing my brows.

Nod

"Since early on, when I first awakened and started training, my family tried to test my mana for fire affinity. I went through various tests so they can see how my mana was exerted and how it flowed through my mana channels."

Jasmine continued on, "When it was made clear that I had no aptitude for fire attribute, my family shunned me."

""

I didn't know how to respond to her. For the first time, the always aloof and cold Jasmine seemed... vulnerable.

"I'm sorry for what happened..." was the only response I managed to utter.

Shaking her head, she gives me a faint smile. "The Twin Horns has treated me well and I don't dislike what I am."

I see her palm form a small swirl of wind, different emotions running through her face as she stares at it.

This world was a place of discrimination and classification. The hierarchical roots imbedded into this land would never truly disappear. Normal humans were considered second-rate people, while even amongst mages Augmenters were

discriminated against by Conjurers. It goes further than that, where unless one is a deviant or a dual element specialist, some elements were considered "higher class" than others. Being born from a family of powerful fire attribute mages, she was discarded as inferior because of the elemental attribute she had; something that most mages would kill to acquire. She was a dark yellow Augmenter skilled in fighting and with mana manipulation at the ripe age of 24. Many would consider her a genius but from the standards she grew up with, she considered herself average at best.

We put in a bit more wood and laid out our sleeping bags a couple meters away so we could still feel the heat.

Lying down, I feel for Sylvie's presence. She was a good distance away but I could tell she was safe. She sends me a thought, saying not to worry and that I should stay safe too.

Eyes closed, I wait to drift off when I hear Jasmine mumble something.

"...It's weird. When I talk to you, it doesn't feel like I'm talking to a child."

I don't respond, pretending to be asleep, hoping she wouldn't push further for a reply.



"Good morning." Jasmine was up and cooking something over the fire by the time I got up.

I look to see that there were a couple of fish skewered on a branch being grilled.

"Good morning! You should've woken me up Jasmine. There's no need for you to do all of the chores on your own."

"...I tried waking you up... You wouldn't budge." Her half closed eyes that give off an apathetic atmosphere looks at me as if I was some sort of wild animal.

"...aha... I'm sorry, I really need to fix that." Maybe it was because I was still growing.

After eating the grilled fish for breakfast, we put out the fire. Jasmine asked if she wanted to take a bath in the stream with her but I just told her I'd go in after her.

Sigh... Being a virtuous King with morals seems to hinder me at times like these.

After washing up, I put on my mask and swords, thinking we'd go hunting for some mana beasts around the area when Jasmine stops me.

"Your opponent for these few days will be me."

"Huh?" I can't help but be surprised at the turn of events. We came all the way here to spar?

"This area is close to the dungeon we will be exploring, but for these days, I want you to focus on fighting me. I noticed that your fighting style seems... awkward at times. Like, you know it in your head, but your body doesn't listen to you... or something along those lines."

Unsheathing her two daggers, she points one at me, continuing, "We won't use any kind of mana for these next few days while sparring."

I unsheathe my shortsword too. "Good idea."

Mana should be used as a supplement to your techniques, not a replacement to cover them.

"Use your other sword..." Jasmine eyes Dawn's Ballad as she says this.

"How did you know this was a sword?" I wasn't planning on hiding my weapon from her but I was still startled.

"...Knowing you, that black stick should be something more than just a cane or a practice stick." She just shrugs, walking a few steps closer to me.

I just nod, throwing the shortsword near the campfire.

Shhinnng

The translucent blade glows a light teal as it smoothly glides out of the scabbard matte black scabbard.

Holding it out in front me, I position myself. "Get ready."

"Y-yeah..." I could tell Jasmine was in awe by the appearance of my sword after it was drawn. I suspect it'll get that kind of reaction anywhere since its beauty stunned even

me.

"Hahp!" Without mana reinforcing my body, I realize just how much I was neglecting myself. My arms felt heavy and my legs felt frail as they pushed off against the ground. I was a fool. I was complaining every time I fought about the limits of my juvenile body, but instead of fixing the problem, I just masked it. "Tch," I can't help but get pissed off at myself for this.

I give a sharp thrust at Jasmine's core. We could cover our bodies with mana if we know we can't block it, to prevent fatal injuries, but besides that, we weren't allowed to reinforce our body.

Jasmine crosses her two daggers; blocking the thrust with ease she knocks my blade down in a swift movement followed right after.

My blade sinks into the ground as she prepares to use her other dagger to swipe at my head.

I squat my legs, lowering my center of gravity as I pull my blade out of the ground. Using the momentum I gained from pulling back my sword, I spin in that direction to lash at her legs.

My blade is met with empty air, Jasmine jumping up to avoid my attack. She won't be able to change direction midair without the help of mana so I continue on with a stab.

Clang

I'm surprised at how heavy the force of the block was, as my hands get numb.

Jasmine gracefully recovers after she blocks my stab by doing a summersault to regain balance.

I give her a weak smile as I wait for my hands to get their feeling back.

"Hey Jasmine... I think I'm going to need more than a couple of days to work this out."

Her lips curl up slightly as she nods in agreement.

I have 3 years before I'll start attending Xyrus Academy. During my time at school, I'll have plenty of chances to focus on studying mana.

I know what to do.

"2 years. Jasmine, don't let me use mana unless absolutely necessary for 2 years. Whether it be on missions or inside dungeons, I'll have to train my body first." I sheathe my sword and can't help but get excited.

This is just the beginning.

Chapter 30 Last Leg

****Dragonspine Inn****

INSIGNIFICANT ADVENTURER'S POV:

"Hey hey, did you hear about the rumor going on?" I say as I put down my mug of beer.

A burly man sitting in the same table finishes off his cup before slamming it on the table. "If you're talking about that famous masked swordsman, I say bullshit!"

I could tell he was a little drunk by his flushed cheeks and glazed eyes.

"No, apparently it's true! An acquaintance of mine supposedly partied with him. He's traveling with Jasmine Flamesworth so it's hard to miss him." A skinny lad with his hair tied in a bun came over to our table to join in on the gossip.

"So? What did your so called 'acquaintance' say about him?" The drunkard exclaimed, getting impatient.

"Well they went together to explore a minor dungeon that's been cleared already. Apparently, he's pretty short! I think the rumors are true in that he's not a mage." The thin lad just shook his head in wonder.

"Bah! I call bullshit! It's either that masked swordsman is an Augmenter, or the rumors are just exaggerated! Did you hear some of the stories going around about him? There was even one rumor that he solo cleared a dungeon by himself? Is that even possible? B class Augmenters can't do that, even if it's a low level dungeon and you expect me to believe an ordinary swordsman can?" The drunkard waves his empty mug for a refill on his beer.

"Yeah man, I would take some of those rumors with a pinch of salt. That solo clear rumor... didn't the guy also say that Jasmine Flamesworth went in with him? She probably helped him inside right?" I take another sip, feeling a little lightheaded.

"Right right? I'm telling you dunderheads, that swordsman is probably not even that strong! Half those rumors are probably rumors of Jasmine Flamesworth! That half-wit warrior dares call himself a swordsman? Bring him here! I'll take him on any day!"

Things were getting loud as the burly drunk was getting more and more intoxicated.

The hottest topic these days amongst Adventurers were about the masked swordsman. Some stories say that he's Jasmine Flamesworth's apprentice, but that was a little far-fetched. It was made known that he took a rank exam to place into B rank, which was really rare. More shocking than that though was, he was now an A class! Moving a full rank up in two year's time?

I just shake my head as I pity myself. Here I was, a borderline C class Adventurer. I failed the exam to move up a class three times this past 3 years. Once you gather enough merit points from going into dungeons and completing missions and quests, Adventurers are allowed the chance to move up a class upon passing an exam.

The exam differs for each class, but supposedly, to go into the A rank, which is first class considered 'elite' the examinee has to fight two on one with two A rank Adventurers and last for 10 minutes.

The weird thing is that when some of the rumors reached the examinees that were there with the masked swordsman when he took his exam, they all said that he was an Augmenter. The rumor got so big around him because everyone who has been on a dungeon exploration with him has said that he uses no mana but was still a monster.

The burly man was sobering up a little now, and was just annoyed by the fact that a midget swordsman was better than him. He was a veteran B class Augmenter after all; I could imagine that was a pretty big source of pride for him.

Kreeeeeen

The squeaky door to the pub opens and I drop the fork that was in my hand as I see a figure entering.

"Well speak of the devil! The little midget swordsman everyone's hyped up about is here! Where's your little guardian?" The burly man gets up from his seat with a snide grin on his face; cheeks still red.

The very same masked swordsman; the one responsible for all of the crazy rumors, he

was here in the flesh.

I see his blue eyes underneath the mask look up at the burly man with an unknown expression. He was wearing a simple black coat that came down to his mid-thigh, the hood on the coat covering up what the mask couldn't. If I were just passing by, even with a mask and two swords, I probably wouldn't have noticed anything particular about him, but when you look carefully, he was an odd sight. The masked figure stood at about 1.6m, which wasn't that tall. He had a very slim figure underneath his coat, which either suggested he was a normal person, or a Conjurer. Strapped behind him were a normal short sword on top and a sleek black stick on the bottom. I couldn't help wondering if he was actually a Conjurer and that was his staff.

After casting a glance at the drunkard that was calling him out, the masked man simply walked past him, uninterested, as if he wasn't worth the time.

"Are you fucking ignoring me? Just because you're a little famous for your bullshit rumors, you think you're better than ME?!" The drunkard hit his last straw as he unsheathed his giantsword from his back and held it above his head to swing down.

"C-calm down! You know you're not allowed to kill someone in here!" I try to quell the man, holding my arms up to stop his sword from swinging, but the masked man didn't even turn back and just kept walking towards the front counter.

This pissed off the drunk even more as he augmented his body and sword, which both glowed a silvery glow, pushed me aside, and swung down at the masked swordsman.

"B0000M!"

I look in horror as I imagine the bloody corpse that was probably cleaved in two from the force of that blow. However, contrary to what I expected, the sword created a small crater next to the masked man, missing him by just a hairs breadth.

Whew... At least the drunk had enough sense to not kill the man; he probably just wanted to scare him.

I stand back up about to calm the burly man down from swinging again but when I turn to him, I see that his face is twisted into a shocked, seething expression.

"GRAAH!" He swings his sword again, lifting it out of the small depression he made on the ground. The customers that were seated in the dining room of the inn were all staring now, some cheering for gore.

With mana reinforcing the burly man's body and his greatsword, no matter how drunk he was; his power and speed were no joke. He attacked with a flurry of swings that obliterated the wooden seats and tables in the way but no matter how much he attacked, his sword always missed. The masked man was actually staying in place, not taking a step away from his position but every time the sword was about to cut him in half, he just turned into a blur, while the only thing the sword hit was an afterimage.

After about a 5-minute barrage of attacks by the burly man and his greatsword, he was sweating profusely as his face showed his frustration, but he was more cautious now as he took a step back.

"Is dodging the only thing you can do? I guess your guardian did all of the hard work for you while all you did was run away!" The man gave him a menacing smile, still confident that he could win against the masked man. He puts both hands on the grip of his sword and swings again, this time much faster than his previous attacks.

Clang

His greatsword that probably weighed more than the masked man himself was sent flying but I don't know how. The sound seemed like it was knocked away by another sword but I couldn't see it. I couldn't even see the masked swordsman pull out his weapon.

"Are you done?"

D0000000M

"A-aah..." was the only sound I heard from the drunk before we all dropped to the ground.

I felt like I was deep underwater. I couldn't breathe and the surrounding atmosphere seemed to want to crush me.

""

I-I'm scared...

S-scary!

I've heard that some elite fighters are able to produce a killing intent that could scare mana beasts away, but what the hell was this? Was there such a thing as a killing intent that could actually kill people?

Slowly turning my head to face the masked man who was obviously the source of this bloodthirst, I feel the blood drain from my face as I look at him.

I couldn't tell what sort of expression he had under his mask but I didn't need to. There seemed to be this dark, baleful aura bursting out of him. I swear I feel like that dark aura around him was alive and raging. The killing intent isn't even focused on me but I had to will myself to keep from wetting my pants.

I see the sorry state that the drunk is in. His eyes are wide and his body stiff, as if he's petrified. He's muttering something and I can see tears stream down his eyes while the crotch area from his pants are a darker shade.

Suddenly, he retracts his bloodthirst and I can breathe again. I take deep gulps of air and end up coughing. I could see the other Adventurers and the workers of the inn doing the same, some in a worse state than I am.

The masked man turns back to the counter and faces the trembling waitress at the front desk, as her face is a full 3 shades lighter than it was before.

"I believe there is a sack of rations under the name 'Note' that a friend of mine ordered not too long ago." The masked man speaks, his baritone voice clear and precise.

"Y-yes! I'll get that for you right away!"

He gives a slight bow to the waitress as she hands him a sack of food and he leaves as the whole inn just watches him go off, not daring to make a sound.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

"What took so long?" Jasmine divides the food and puts it into each of the pouches attached to the saddle of our horses.

"Ah I had a little quarrel with one of the Adventurers at the inn! Haha." I scratch my head as I hop on my brown mount.

I could feel Jasmine staring at me suspiciously, her half closed eyes judging me.

"Don't mind don't mind! I didn't make a big deal out of it! I didn't even hurt the guy!" I just wave my hand to try and convince Jasmine from going back into Dragonspine Inn.

Jasmine just shakes her head and gets on her horse as well, snapping at the reigns to go.

"Haap!" I do the same as we head towards our destination.

I think back over the last two years. Jasmine wanted me to get to A class as soon as possible to explore the dungeon we were heading towards today. Along the journey to raise my class, she ranked up as well, becoming an AA class Adventurer. There was still quite a bit of a level difference between her and Kaspian but she did improve a lot during these two years. When we weren't on missions or exploring low class dungeons, we were sparring. At night, I made sure to meditate for at least a couple of hours before I went to sleep. During these past two years, I broke through into the light orange stage, which I count as a success considering how much time I spent meditating.

No. The biggest improvement throughout this period was definitely my body. Not using mana made me take a step back and remember how to use my body and sword efficiently so I can be that much better when I augment myself. I can't say I'm at 100% in terms of strength, since the physical reach of my limbs and my muscles are not as developed as it was when I was an adult, but I no longer feel awkward or restrained when I fight now. I fine-tuned some of my sword techniques to better fit my current body, which I'll need to improve along the way.

I can't say it was an easy ride and I have scars on my body to prove it, but I know it was worth it. Coupled with my Dragon Will assimilated body and the use of mana rotation, I could finally be at ease in knowing that I was on the right track for the future.

Jasmine has gotten stronger than ever before. While journeying with her, I noticed that her biggest flaw was in her swordsmanship. Growing up while only learning fire attribute skills for a little until she was deemed unfit, she was on her own to learn how to best control her swords to fit her wind attribute skills.

I wasn't the best at wind but that didn't mean I couldn't teach her skills regarding it.

She passed the AA class examination by utilizing the new skills I taught her along with her double blade techniques she developed on her own. I wanted to take the AA class exam as well, but the merit point requirements made it so I needed to complete a lot more missions or clear dungeons before I'm eligible to.

I send out a mental transmission to Sylvie. She's been acting strange ever since we came to the Beast Glades. We would always keep in touch, but for some reason she didn't want to come meet me yet, even when I go back to Xyrus to visit my family. Every time I tell her to come back, she says there's something she needs to finish before coming back. I could definitely tell how much she's matured though. We can hold conversations and her emotions have developed to become more complex.

While I went home a couple of times during the first year, since last year, it's taken too long to make the trip back to Xyrus and come back to the dungeons every time. Instead, we stuck to letters and meeting Father or Mother every so often at Guild Hall, where the transportation gates are. She has been pretty dissatisfied by this fact but she doesn't keep me from being an Adventurer. I could tell my father has been keeping up with his training because he broke through into the solid orange stage now, which is impressive for someone his age. He smiles at me proudly both at himself and at his son who's doing well.

They've also been telling me a lot about what's happening at the Helstea House. My sister is still quite a bit away from forming her mana core, but I was surprised when I learned that Lilia awakened a couple of weeks ago. Her awakening caused her bed to implode, which was about average for a mage. Her parents were ecstatic to say the least by this and didn't wait to enroll her into Xyrus Academy. After being tested, while her mana core was about average, it turned out that her mana veins were excellent. She had a high capability to absorb mana from her surroundings, which was essential for all Conjurers. I guess she'll be my senior at school when I start going next year.

Snapping me out of my thoughts, I hear, "We're here..." as Jasmine slows down her mount, approaching a clearing in the woods we were traversing.

In front of the dungeon entrance, which was just a cave in this case, was a group of people clearing their camp and getting ready to go in. I guess we were the last to arrive.

"Cheh... I guess we're stuck with more Augmenters." I hear an all too familiar, snotty voice. Getting off of my mount, I walk towards the group of Adventurers when the blond fire Conjurer from the examination site gives me a distasteful look. Jasmine

follows behind me as an armored Augmenter steps up and holds up his hand in front of him, gesturing for a shake.

"Please don't mind Lucas and let me introduce you to the party. My name is Reginald Brooks and I'm an A class Augmenter. I am an Earth Attribute yellow stage core that specializes in using a hammer." He points at the giant hammer that was on the ground where the group was.

Reginald had a short, messy brown hair that matched his eyes. He had a very square face that made him seem more masculine with his short beard and 1.9m height and broad shoulders.

The group consisted of Reginald, Kriol, and Brald as the Augmenters besides us. Kriol was a very defensive, water attribute Augmenter that only used a gigantic shield as his weapon. He was rather short, at around 1.7m and was kind of fat. I could tell he was strong though, by how firm his body was overall, despite his belly. Brald was a very noble-looking man that stood at about 1.8m. He wore a white metal armor that covered his shoulders and chest only, with a cape behind him. With a trimmed blond hair with sharp hazel eyes, he seemed like a real lady-killer. To my surprise, he was a real gentleman and offered us handshakes and a smile.

"I go by Brald and just became an AA class, light yellow stage Augmenter. I am a fire attribute Augmenter that specializes with the broadsword and shield. I'll be the one to lead us today." He beams.

After the Augmenters introduced themselves, the Conjurers stepped up. Aside from Lucas, there were 4 other Conjurers. One of them was a lanky man and the other a girl, while the last one was the serious-looking, bespectacled black haired boy that was also at the examination site! What was his name again...?

"My name is Elijah Knight. A class, dark orange stage conjurer... single specialization in Earth." He says simply.

I can't help but eye him carefully. There had to be more than that. He wouldn't be able to get by with skipping the exam and being placed into B rank by just being an Earth Conjurer no matter how young he was.

The beady-eyed lanky man that looked well into his thirties came up next. He had a smug look on his face despite his less than attractive appearance, with his crooked

nose and parted brown hair. "Ahem! I go by Oliver and I am an A class, dark yellow stage Conjurer. I am an Emitter deviant, specializing in healing." He sticks his jaw out smugly while crossing his arms.

Despite his attitude, I can't say I'm not glad to have a healer this time.

"Hi! My name is Samantha but you guys can just call me Sammy! Dark yellow stage, A class Conjurer with a Single specialization in water at your service!" She throws in a wink at my direction. Samantha looked to be around her mid-twenties and was an attractive woman but by her attitude, I'm sure she knew it too. She had wavy blond hair that flowed down her shoulders and light blue eyes that looked almost grey. Her eyes were big and round; making her look cuter and her short height of about 1.5m complimented that well. While her assets weren't abundant like a certain wind Conjurer from the Twin Horns, she had a nice figure and I could tell Oliver had a thing for her by how he kept taking side-glances at her.

"Jasmine, light-yellow stage, AA class Augmenter. Wind attribute with dual swords."

My partner says without batting an eye.

"Note, light orange stage, A class Augmenter. Fire attribute with specialization in sword." I said simply.

Brald smiled at us, "Welcome you two! I'm certainly glad to have another AA class in the group!" The other two Augmenters nodded in agreement while Oliver and Lucas had faces that showed they didn't care while he simply announced that he was a fire specialized Conjurer who was at yellow stage. Elijah kept his stone face while I notice how Samantha keeps looking at me, trying to look through the mask somehow.

"I can't help but ask. Mr. Note, there have been various rumors about you saying that you are not an Augmenter, yet you clearly just announced that you are." Reginald asks, picking up his giant hammer and leaning it against his shoulder.

"I haven't been using my magic for a while due to personal reasons. That must've been the reason why those rumors came up." I just shrugged, signaling them to move on.

Noticing that I didn't want to indulge their curiosity, he simply coughs and sets up the formation for the party.

It would basically be Brald in the front, since his shield and sword style was the best

fit for the front line. Beside him were Reginald and I, who both specialized in offense. Guarding the rear was Kriol with his gigantic shield to prevent us from getting flanked and Jasmine beside him ready to kill anything that may get past him. We were all in charge of protecting the four Conjurers with Oliver in the dead center, the most protected since he was the healer.

"We should head out immediately!" Brald declared. He was assuming the position as the leader since he was the front line and the only other AA class besides the quiet Jasmine.

This dungeon was deemed AA class, meaning parties with only A class and above are allowed to enter. Brald recently found out that there was a hidden tunnel that leads to an unexplored portion of the dungeon, which we would be exploring today. This meant that most of our dungeon exploring would be through uncharted parts. Everyone unsheathed their weapons while even the smug Conjurers put on a serious face as we stepped into the dungeon named by the first explorers "The Dire Tombs".

Chapter 31 Dire Tombs (1)

Stepping into the dungeon, I felt the temperature suddenly drop as we descended down a slope. I stood to the right side of Brald, who had his shield up in position and his sword drawn.

Jasmine and I did some research on the Dire Tombs dungeon we were in now. It was a unique place, even amongst the mysterious dungeons. The beasts that made their homes here have been described in the records as undead. I've never heard of mana beasts that could come back to life. Because of this, one of the hardest aspects of clearing this dungeon seems to be the endless amount of undead mana beasts.

Digging deeper, some Adventurers and mage guilds even speculated that inside the bottom of this dungeon might be a special artifact that can reanimate dead mana beasts, but no one has been able to prove it.

Clearing the dungeon meant that the area has been explored. It's different from conquering the dungeon, where the mana beasts inside have been defeated and the treasures looted.

This dungeon has been cleared, or at least it was until Brald discovered the hidden passage, but never defeated.

"We're approaching the first level of the dungeon, stay on guard. The mana beasts here aren't strong, but there'll be a lot of them. Don't waste your time trying to collect the mana cores from the beasts... they don't have one." Brald declares.

I hear a faint muttering from Oliver, our healer, who's complaining about the lack of rewards from this dungeon.

While the goal of defeating a dungeon is to loot the accumulated treasures high-level mana beasts have collected, most of the profit, usually, comes from collecting the beast cores on the way down. In most cases, even if parties can't defeat or even clear a dungeon, they can still come out with a hefty sum from just the beast cores, which could be sold for a high price. One of the reasons this dungeon is so unpopular, and

why our party is the only one inside the dungeon, is that the mana beasts here have no cores. This meant a big chunk of revenue from trying to clear the dungeon would be gone.

"GRRRRRRRR"

I narrow my eyes and focus. We just reached the end of the descending passage and into an underground cave around 50 meters in diameter. Looking around, the whole cave is glowing in a dim blue color. Above us, the cave was covered in stalactites that seemed to threaten us with their sharp tips gleaming. There were around 20 mana beasts that looked like big bats, except with no wings but instead four limbs. The hollow body of the bat-like mana beasts had their ribs fully visible and inside it, where the beast core should've been, was a cracked rock.

I guess it was true.

"Batrunners! They're not strong but they attack in groups. Minimalizing the usage of our mana is going to be the key inside this dungeon! Get ready!" Brald roars over the growling of the Batrunners, all of them positioned to pounce, with their patches of fur standing on end and their teeth bared.

"Form and torment the foes around! Fire Cyclone!" I hear a yell from behind me and I realize it's Lucas who casted the spell.

Suddenly, four twisters of fire 3 meters high swirled into life around our group and spread out.

YELP *YELP*

Many of the Batrunners were eaten up by the fire tornadoes and were burned up. The ones that were fortunate enough to escape the tornadoes fled, trying to circle around and attack us.

I could hear Brald click his tongue, dissatisfied that Lucas just ignored his orders and casted a spell that wasn't needed.

The fire cyclones killed most of the Batrunners and the ones left were badly burned so defeating the rest were quick.

"Next time, follow orders and don't waste mana like that. Your spell was overkill."

Brald growled.

Lucas just rolled his eyes, "I don't see the problem. We killed them fast enough so that everyone else could save their mana."

Shaking his head, Brald just ushered us forward to the other end of the cave. Before going into the next room, I hear crunching noises behind me and to my surprise, the Batrunners that were just killed dug themselves out of the ground, looking rather unhurt, aside from their ribs sticking out.

Dire Tombs... What an unfortunately fitting name for this dungeon.

We just ignored them and went into the other room while Elijah quietly casted a wall of rock over the entrance so that the Batrunners couldn't follow us.

The opening on the other side of the cave lead us through another dark corridor that was around the width of 4 people, standing shoulder to shoulder.

I could tell everyone was a bit more relaxed upon leaving the first cave but I couldn't shake this uneasy feeling.

"Fwishshshsh!"

"Clang clang clang!"

My shortsword blurred as I instinctively parried the projectiles aimed towards Samantha.

"T-thank you..." even under the dim blue lighting, I could tell that Samantha's face paled as the earthen spikes that almost killed her landed on the ground beside her feet.

"Something's wrong... there were no traps last time." Brald picked up one of the pointed rocks to study it but was baffled.

The presence of traps meant that there were high-level mana beasts capable of conjuring spells with activation requirements.

"Stay alert everyone." Jasmine already had her twin daggers guarding her vitals but Reginald and Kriol readied their weapons as Samantha inched a bit closer to me, her hand pinching my sleeve, her free hand gripping her wand.

Fortunately, we reached the end of the hall with no other traps deterring us. The next cave that we arrived in front of was similar to the previous cave, but twice the size and there were suspicious holes scattered on the ground.

"Don't get near the holes. They're geysers that shoot extremely hot streams of gas up. It should be fine as long as you're not in direct proximity of the blast." Brald announced, looking around for any signs of mana beasts.

RUMBLE

As if on cue, the cave trembles and from the ground pops up something that oddly resembles a worm, except it was a glowing red and about a couple meters thick and unfathomably long, countless rows of teeth circling the hole on the head.

"Was that here last time Brald?" Kriol looks at our leader.

"N-no... I don't get what's happening. It doesn't make sense for new mana beast species to enter a dungeon like this." The handsome knight has a wavering look, losing his confidence.

"Cheh. It's not a big deal as long as I'm here." Lucas just flips his blonde hair.

However, the gigantic red worm doesn't attack us but burrows down, creating another hole.

"It doesn't seem to be after us." Muttered Elijah while his sharp, bespectacled eyes studied the giant worm.

The red worm-beast is now burrowing itself into the walls of the cave, creating more holes from all different angles, never confronting us.

"Are we just going to stand around watching the worm dig or are we going to go?" Oliver, our lanky Emitter, just pushes past Brald and me, confidently striding towards the other end of the cave.

He wanted to show is confidence in front of Samantha is what I assumed.

"Get back here! We need to assess what's happening before we go across!" Brald gets

more and more frustrated at the arrogance displayed by the Conjurers as he steps forward to go after him.

Suddenly, the whole cave shakes and we hear a light fizzing sound.

"LUCAS! HEAT WAVE BARRIER! NOW!" I scream at the confused blonde noble.

"FWW0000000M!"

The holes. The holes existent in the beginning and the holes on the ground, roof, and walls made by the giant worm all trembled and released a fiery blast of gas.

The giant worm was making the holes in order to kill us and we just let it happen.

I managed to pull Brald who was just in arm's length of me before he had the chance to run after Oliver.

The shield was erected in time to shield us from the gas but Oliver faded out of sight.

The eruption of gas lasted for a couple of minutes until it sizzled down.

Lucas released the weakened barrier and we stood in silence at the scene in front of us.

The only thing left of Oliver was the gem on top of his staff.

"FUCK!" Brald shouts, grinding his teeth at the loss.

Oliver didn't mean much to us as a person but he was our healer. That idiot ran off, not even casting a barrier spell on himself.

Samantha's face looked sickly as she covered her mouth with her hands.

Before we had the chance to step out, Lucas pushes past and picks up the gem that was a few meters in front of us.

"Tch... his gem isn't even good." He just tosses it back towards us and Brald picks it up who then hands it to Samantha, who studies it and replaces the gem on her wand with the one that Oliver had; her hands trembling the whole time.

"We need to move before another eruption occurs. That giant worm beast is making more holes. I don't think Lucas' Barrier will hold for another wave." Our leader states as he moves forward.

I look back at Jasmine and she just solemnly nods at me. We were all frustrated by the turn of events.

We were half way through the cave when Elijah, who was right next to me asks, "How did you know Lucas' Heat Wave Barrier would be so effective against the steam?" I could see Lucas and Samantha turn their eyes towards me, waiting for an answer.

"I've been through a similar experience before and a heat barrier seemed to negate a gas attack the best." I just shrug.

Around us, the giant worm that was creating more holes when it suddenly stopped in front of us.

Without warning, it whipped its head and smashed at the ground we were at before.

Kriol, who was at the back, stepped forward and with Samantha, created a water barrier the cushioned the blow while Elijah erected a flat shield of earth to stop the weakened attack of the worm before crumbling.

"Impact Blast!" Reginald's giant hammer glowed a bright yellow as he swung at the worm beast.

"BOOM!"

The worm's whole body shook as Reginald's skill sent ripples of mana into its body.

I followed up, drawing my short sword and willing flames to surround the blade while activating mana rotation.

"Flame Blade."

I tore through the underside of the worm, welding the wound as my blade burned through the flesh.

The worm let out a shrill screech before it collapsed next us, part of its body still underground.

"The oversized worm wasn't even strong." Lucas just shakes his head, disappointed, when all of a sudden we hear another rumble.

The worm wasn't trying to kill us; it was trying to delay us in time for another eruption from the holes.

"FW000000000MMMM!"

Lucas couldn't erect his barrier in time as his eyes widen in surprise.

"Phoenix's Cape." A surge of fire surrounds my body protecting me against the gas. I look back in relief to see that Jasmine has erected a swirling aura of wind around her that dissipated the steam.

"GAAH!" "UGGH!"

The gas dispels to reveal an injured Brald. Kriold managed to protect Lucas and Elijah under his gigantic shield augmented with water but Brald's sword arm was obliterated from the elbow down while he tried to shield Samantha. It seemed like Brald only augmented his shield in flames instead of his whole body to protect Samantha. Reginald had a few burns over his body but he was okay. He probably was barely in time to surround himself with earth attribute mana.

Our leader's sword was on the ground, as his stump of an arm was burned black at the end.

Gritting his teeth, he drops his shield and picks up his sword with his left arm. "MOVE IT!"

We arrive at the front of the next hall, which was a lot wider this time.

Taking a moments rest, the group all sat down while Samantha used part of her robe to create a makeshift bandage for what was left of Brald's right arm.

Even AA class Adventurers that had their body augmented couldn't completely handle the abrupt gas attacks from the holes.

Looking around, everyone had discouraged looks on their faces. This wasn't even half way through the dungeon but we were already in a poor state, our leader critically injured.

"This is why I said to stay alert Lucas! If you had stayed focused and reacted in time to set up a barrier, I wouldn't be in this state!" Brald's handsome face was nowhere to be seen as he lashed out at the noble boy. His career as an Adventurer was probably gone after this. He'll probably be demoted from his class once the Guild finds out of his crippling injury.

"Don't blame me! It was your fault you couldn't protect yourself in time!" He argued back.

"Are you fucking kidding me? Kriol had to save your ass! You didn't do shit and you're saying it's my fault?" Brald yells as he prepares to swing his sword at the boy.

"ENOUGH!" I roar. The whole party turns silent at the power of my voice.

"There are a couple of choices we need to make. Reginald's body is a bit burnt but I don't think it's that bad but Brald, you need to make the choice of whether you want to continue or not. We're only a bit more than an hour from the surface so you can probably make it back up by yourself." I state, staring at our leader through the slits of my mask.

"I'll keep going. This will probably be my last dungeon raid so I might as well make it last." He just turns his body and sits a couple feet away, cradling his right stump.

I turn my gaze to the noble boy who had a face that says he did nothing wrong. "Lucas. You need to get your act together. It doesn't matter whether you're a light yellow core or God himself. Right now, the only thing you are is a liability. If you continue acting out on your own, you might as well just go on by yourself."

He glares back at me but bites his lip, not knowing how to refute.

"Samantha and Elijah. We need you guys to stay focused to set up a barrier at moment's notice."

"Let's get a couple hours of rest before we continue on." I sit down next to Jasmine and take out a sack of water from my bag.

The group remained in silence before I go up to Brald. As minutes dragged into hours, his arm missing was getting to him. The confident, charismatic face was nowhere to be seen, replaced by a crazed look. "I think either Jasmine or I should take charge of this party. You're in no condition."

Brald's eyes, dull and weary, study me before he starts eying everyone else in the group, who just looked away.

"Tch. Okay." I didn't like the mental state he was in. It wasn't stable.

After a couple hours, we got up with our mana replenished and continued marching down. This hall wasn't as long as the previous ones but at the end of the hall was a big, double door with chains locking them shut.

"I-I don't get it. Even this part is different. The door this time wasn't locked and it definitely wasn't this big." Brald shakes his head.

"The only thing that was the same was the first cave, where the Batrunners were." He continues, studying the lock. He tries to touch it but with his dominant hand gone, he just swung his stub in the air. After realizing, he just grumbles and goes to the back.

"Well, no use complaining about it now." Reginald lifts his hammer and slams it against the door.

"BOOM!"

I could see Reginald visibly shocked by the sturdiness of the door.

"Impact Blast!" The door shudders but stays firm.

"Impact Blast!" The blow this time was harder and the lock crumbles. Stepping forward, he pulls the handles of the door and opens it.

"What the..."

Chapter 32 Dire Tombs (2)

Through the other side of the door was a field of grass that reminded me of a masterfully painted piece of art. It was a couple of hundred meters wide and I couldn't even see the other end of the cave.

"Let me guess, this field wasn't here last time either?" Reginald mutters, his eyes never leaving the scene in front of him.

"N-no..." Brald takes a deep breath, astounded as well.

Reginald just mumbles something under his breath and takes a step through the door, where we all followed in after.

This didn't resemble a cave at all, where even the brightness within was enough to make our eyes squint. The rows of stalactites high up on the ceiling of the cave were the only things that reaffirmed our doubts that this was actually an underground cavern.

"Wow! It's so pretty!" Samantha couldn't help be in awe at the serene meadow.

There were tall trees and plants dotted across the field. Even I couldn't help want to just lay down and relax here but ever since we walked through the door, the hairs on my body have been standing on its end, as if my body wants me to stay wary.

Everyone's guards were down but I noticed that Jasmine and even Elijah kept darting their eyes around, looking out for anything suspicious.

"Something's off. Keep your guards up guys." I stay vigilant with my shortsword out and my left hand on the grip of Dawn's Ballad that was still sheathed to my waist.

"Are you sure? I don't even hear anything, let alone see much besides the grass and trees." Kriol is a bit doubtful but raises his shield and wills water affinity mana into it.

I study my surroundings to see what was making me feel so tense. The light seemed

to come from the stalactites that glowed much brighter than the ones from the previous caves. There was a slight haze all over the field that seemed insignificant, but that was it. There was literally nothing else besides the plants and this mist.

What am I missing?

I notice the mist around us gradually get thicker, so I could only make out the shapes of everyone around me.

Thump

"Clara? Is that you? H-how are you alive?"

I spin my head to the direction of the voice. I see that Kriol dropped his gigantic shield. He's holding his arms out looking at something in the distance.

"I knew you couldn't be dead Clara! Stay there! I'm coming to get you!" Kriol bolts off, leaving his shield behind him.

"Stop! It's dangerous!" I yell after him, but it's too late as his figure fades out of sight.

Jasmine grabs my arm and sticks close. "I think the mist is an illusion."

"I suspected that as well." I nod in agreement. "Everyone! Stick together! This mist is playing tricks on our senses. Samantha, barrier!"

Huddling together, we face each other to discuss a plan inside the ball of water protecting us from the mist.

"Who's Clara?" Samantha asks.

Reginald shakes his head. "I-it's Kriol's fiancée. But it's impossible that she's alive. I-I saw her get killed in a dungeon with my own two eyes. We buried her together!"

I could tell Reginald and Brald were both shaken up. The three have partied before a couple of times so the name Clara wasn't news to them and hearing Kriol go after his dead fiancée wasn't good news.

"What the hell is going on..." Lucas just mutters and I could tell by how hard he was gripping his staff that he was holding in the urge to blow this whole place up.

"Jasmine. Can you create a wind big enough to clear this mist around us?" I look towards my partner, hoping she could give me some good news. We didn't have any wind attribute Conjurers here.

She looks down and answers. "Not big enough to clear it all away, but I can blow away a path."

We give her a bit of space inside the ball of water as she starts emitting a green aura. The wind picks up as it swirls and gathers to form a small whirlwind around her arms. Her straight black hair lashes chaotically around her, as the mini tornadoes gathering in her arms get bigger and tears apart the water barrier.

While Augmenters' biggest disadvantage compared to Conjurers are the usage of long ranged spells, after a certain level, Augmenters will be able to store and exert enough mana to use ranged techniques. Of course, however, the power and efficiency would be vastly inferior to a Conjurer of the same level.

The mist around us was getting thicker, limiting our field of vision to about a meter away from us. The once peaceful field of grass now has an ominous feel, almost as if this mist wants to swallow us whole.

"Storm's Gale."

The condensed whirlwinds swirling around Jasmine's arms collide as she claps her hands together in front of her. The impact of the two tornadoes expands and bursts forward, shredding the mist into a clear path in front of us.

The once excited looks on everyone's faces turn dim at the sight before us. The tornado revealed a path, but also uncovered something else.

There were tentacles of vines and branches that were making their way towards us.

"Enough of this!" Lucas points his tall staff towards the incoming wave of vines and mutters a spell.

"Crescent Ember!" Swinging his staff, the fire glowing on the tip of the staff shoots a large blade fire.

"BOOOM!"

The slithering vines and branches flinch back from the flame but other than a dark mark where the spell hit, they were unfazed.

"Shit! What kind of trees isn't afraid of fire?" Brald grits his teeth as he ignites his broadsword in a fiery tornado and charges into the wave of vines that were crawling our way.

"Samantha! Elijah! Lucas! Support us!" I command, willing mana into my body and sword as well.

Jasmine rushes next to me, both daggers unsheathed. The spell she just used obviously drained a lot of her mana, but it didn't do much as the mist already refilled the path the tornado spell created.

Reginald stayed behind to protect our Conjurers as they're casting spells.

"RAAAAAHHH!" Brald is hacking away at the endless wave of vines that seem to come out of nowhere.

The vines seem to be regenerating faster than Brald is cutting them though, as I see him getting buried deeper and deeper inside.

That idiot. Is he really an AA class Adventurer? He's lost his cool and his ability to pay attention to what's happening around him is nonexistent.

I augment my sword in fire as well, speeding up to support our one-armed companion.

"Flame Whip." The fire around my sword grows larger as a whip of fire forms from the base of the blade.

Lashing my weapon at the vines shooting themselves at me, a pile of dismembered branches form around me.

I keep tabs on Jasmine to make sure she's okay but she seemed to be fine on her own as her body was a cyclone of blades, mincing any vines that came her direction.

Brald was having a harder time as I notice various gashes on his face and body.

"Spread and burn! Liquid Fire!" Lucas finishes his spell first as he shoots a fiery spray of red liquid from his staff while Reginald was blocking the incoming vines shooting

at our Conjurers.

The three of us jump back to stay out of the way of the spell. I had to hand it to the noble brat that he's still thinking straight in this situation. The spell Liquid Fire wasn't as powerful as the actual fire spells but it spreads quickly and if not doused, the fire would keep spreading.

The spell lands on the torrent of vines, but before the liquid fire is even able to spread, the mist that was around us all gathered towards where the spell hit the vine.

FSSSSSSSSSS

The spell didn't even last two seconds as the liquid formed from the condensed mist doused it.

Lucas's face pales as sweat drips down his neck. I think that last spell was as much as he could do for now.

"Crater."

Elijah's brows furrow as he finishes his spell. The ground underneath the wave of vines crumbles and a hole a couple of meters deep deter the vines from reaching us for now.

"Water drain!"

Samantha crumbles to her knees as she releases the powerful spell.

Water drain was a scary spell that sucked the surrounding area the spell affected of its water. The only drawback of this spell was the amount of mana it used for the limited amount of space.

CRACKLE

The rampant vines that were crawling out of the crater Elijah conjured were withering at a rapid pace as the moisture was sucked out of them.

Before the withering spread, the rest of the mist surrounding the cave swirled and gathered, sucked in by the vines. The dead brown vines were once again filled with vigor and seemed angrier, if that was even possible.

"N-no way..." Samantha's drained face just slackens in shock.

The mist that once surrounded us was all absorbed into the huge wave of vines and our limited view was cleared.

As the mist was sucked into the vines, we all finally got to see what exactly it was we were up against.

Towering almost 20 meters above our heads was a gigantic mana beast. This mana beast looked humanoid to a certain degree, reminding me of a centaur. While it was made up completely of entangled vines and branches, the top half of its body was that of an armored man. The two green eyes that looked down at us were filled with pride and anger. Its two humanoid arms were holding unto a giant wooden lance that looked more like a drill. Its lower body was that of a horse, but instead of limbs, were an uncountable amount of vines.

For the last hour, the seven of us were literally battling against the feet of this mana beast.

"...I-I've read about that monster... That's an S class mana beast named the E-Elderwood Guardian!" Samantha just stutters in horror as she just sinks in defeat.

"What's an S class mana beast doing here? This is unheard of..." Reginald almost drops his giant hammer as he looks up at the Elderwood Guardian in horror.

An S class mana beast meant that he was on par with an SS class Adventurer or at least 10 S class Adventurers.

"I-Isn't that Kriol?" Reginald points at the lifeless torso and legs sticking out of the body of the mana beast.

"W-we're doomed..." Brald has a crazy look on his face as he's smiling madly at the giant mana beast. He already lost his arm and he was worn out from the fighting. This was probably the last straw for the veteran Adventurer.

"We have to run." Jasmine pulls my hand, gesturing me to leave the party here and run away.

"What about them?" I mutter out, my eyes never leaving the gaze of the Elderwood Guardian. Even if I wasn't too close to any of them and I certainly wasn't on close terms

with Lucas, it wasn't right to betray their trust as their leader like this.

""

She doesn't respond as she tugs harder at me to move.

"BOOOOM!" The Elderwood Guardian thrusts his giant drill lance at us.

"Rock Shield!"

Elijah erects a flat wall of earth from the ground slanted, so the force of the drill is parried away from us.

Picking up his hammer, Reginald yells, "Impact Blast x10"

The giant hammer vibrates in his hands as it's surrounded in a thick yellow aura.

"BOOBOOBOOBOOOM!"

As the hammer hits the lance, multiple lumps form on the mana beast's weapon and explodes from the inside.

Just as he's about to land on the ground, the broken vines that made up the lance whirl and surround him.

"GAAAH! HELPP!! NOOOO!" The tendrils that formed the giant lance flurry around to mold back into its original shape but entangle Reginald inside.

CRUNCH *CRUNCH* *SNAP*

I hear Samantha hurl from the sound of Reginald's body being grinded up into pieces.

Fuck.

The lance is formed back into its original shape, with the addition of Reginald's body and weapon inside it. The Elderwood Guardian doesn't have a mouth but from the look in its eyes, I feel like it's gloating at us, as if we're just bugs to him.

I grab Samantha who was still in shock and lift her up on my shoulders. "Jasmine! Grab Brald and let's run! Lucas, Elijah! You have to try and block any incoming attacks until

we get out of here!"

Jasmine picks up Brald who's still laughing psychotically and we look back to see that the Elderwood Guardian was looking directly at us.

"We need to move!" Just as I will mana into my body...

"Fire bolts!" A blast of fire hits me square in the chest and I fly back, Samantha tumbling off to the side.

While the mana that was reinforced into my body and the fact that I had assimilated mana into my bones and muscles prevented me from sustaining serious injuries, my breath was still knocked out from the almost point-blank spell casted by Lucas. Furious and baffled by the sudden betrayal, I peel my eyes away from the blond brat and look for Jasmine. She was knocked back much farther from the spell and was unconscious, but she didn't seem to be dead.

"What the hell are you doing?" I hear Elijah yell for the first time as he points his staff at Lucas who was already heading towards the entrance of the cave.

"Pfft! You think I'll risk my life to help all of you escape? Be honored that you'll be the valiant heroes that stalled the beast enough for me to escape! I'll tell everyone all about your courageous deeds!" He looks back giving me an arrogant smirk before casting a smokescreen spell.

CRASH

The ground splits around us as the Elderwood's Lance pierces a hole where Lucas was in the smokescreen but he's already gone.

"Fuck!" The stumbling Elijah curses while he straightens his glasses. The endless vines that make up the mana beast's limbs manage to climb out of the crater left from Elijah's spell and approach us.

"GRAAAAAH!" The whole cave trembles as the gigantic mana beast's beady green eyes turn bright red.

The Elderwood Guardian's whole body disassembles into a tsunami of vines, destroying everything in its way as it's almost upon us.

"HAHAHA!" I hear Brald's maniacal laughter as he's eaten up by the wave of vines.

Elijah's brusque face pales and his legs are trembling while Jasmine is still in a daze from Lucas's spell. It must've managed to catch her off guard before she had time to reinforce her body as I see some bleeding.

I start calculating the options I had left. Even if I were to use the first phase of my Beast's Will, I can't last long enough to save everyone and carry them out.

Fuck.

I don't know how severe the recoil of this would be but I had no choice but to try.

I feel a surge of energy forming around my body and I'm surrounded by an aura of different colors.

"Phase Two. Dragon's Awakening."

Chapter 33 Dire Tombs (3)

"Kyuu?"

Undergoing Dragon's Awakening seemed to startle Sylvie who was now frantically asking me what's going on and why I was activating my second phase.

'It's fine Sylv. I want you to stay away for now and if anything happens, go back to the Helstea's house for me.

'No! I'm going to go towards you now Papa. Hold on!' I could sense Sylvie getting closer but she's still a few dozen kilometers away.

'Stay away Sylv! Please! I need someone to tell my family what happens just in case.' I say desperately.

I don't know if I'm going to make it out of this alive, and I don't want my family wondering what happened and why the ring activated.

'Be careful...'

'Thanks Sylv.'

One of the abilities of my first phase, Acquire, allowed me to temporary separate myself from the space and time around me, which seemed to be one of Sylvia's innate skills. That phase was limited in many ways because I'm not a dragon. The limited mana I have access to restricts what I can actually do when I activate the 'Acquire' phase.

The most efficient way, I realized when I was training with Grandpa Virion, was coupling the first phase with Thunderclap Impulse. I would activate my first phase in short millisecond bursts while the reaction time of my body is increased dramatically from my lightning skill; this allows me to react and counter almost anything. That was the best way I could think of for utilizing my first phase, since I can't affect anything that's "frozen" while the first phase is activated. Even though I can't able to keep it up

for long, that was my biggest trump card; the fact that the first phase of my beast will isn't noticeable by those around me makes it all the more useful.

I think back to when I first used the 'Acquire' phase on someone else along with me that time at the auction house. Sebastian wasn't able to communicate with anyone besides me since I separated us from the time and space of those around us. I could only last a few seconds before I was crippled in bed for the next day.

Right now, though, was one of those times where my first phase wouldn't be so useful. No matter how much I can react to this tsunami of vines, I could neither dodge it nor escape from it in one piece.

No choice.

FW0000M

I feel every pore in my body opening and a surge of mana flowing in and out of my body.

The air around me distorts and the ground below my feet starts cracking from the mana surrounding my body.

My vision shifts into black and white. The only colors I see are from the numerous particles of mana in the atmosphere around me, all shimmering to the corresponding elements they make up.

The surge of mana that was rampaging around me suddenly gets compressed into my body and the feeling of holding insurmountable power overwhelms me. The sense of superiority over everything, living or not, in this universe almost makes me go crazy. I suppress the urge to destroy everything and everyone around me just because of how insignificant they seem to be compared to me now.

"Kuh!"

The mana in the atmosphere seems to bend to my will, as if even nature is under my command.

"Phase Two. Dragon's Awakening... Integrate."

The same markings that Sylvia once had, the golden yellow runes, run down my arms

and back. I see my hair get longer, coming down to my shoulder, and the once auburn color of my hair was now a bright luminescent white, swaying from the swirl of energy constantly encompassing me. The Integrate phase seemed to make me look more like Sylvia.

Calming the voice inside my head that wants to go on a rampage, I look around. Jasmine and Elijah are the only ones left. Elijah is next to Jasmine now, supporting her up with his shoulders while she's still out of breath and sweating in pain from the point blank impact from Lucas' spell. He's looking at me with a dazed expression, his once serious face almost comical, as his glasses are crooked and his jaws slack.

"GRRRAAAAAAAAAAAWRR"

The tsunami of vines that made up the Elderwood Guardian expands as a face is formed within the wave. The face was looking at me; the face that once looked at us like we were insects had a trace of fear in it now.

"Let's play." I smirk.

The world moves around me in slow motion as I jump up, willing wind unto my feet. I instantly clear the distance between the Elderwood Guardian and myself in a split second as a storming gale I propelled myself off with creates a crater bigger than the spell Elijah used.

"Thunderclap Impulse." A surge of black lightning forms around my body as I effortlessly dodge the thousands of vines that shoot at me.

Every vine that the tendrils of black lightning surrounding me touches instantly disintegrates and withers away, but for every vine dead, ten more replace it. Using the vines that are shooting at me as a foothold, I breeze through the onslaught of vines that were the size of my body, covered in thorns, as I draw near the core of the Elderwood Guardian.

I could already feel the recoil from using the second phase as my body is trembling and I hold back the urge to vomit blood.

It was time to end this.

"White Fire..." Both my hands ignite and are engulfed in a blazing white flame that almost freezes the air around it. This was the most powerful offensive skill that I had

in my arsenal, but one that was also the hardest to control. While my Lightning Attribute skills are focused more towards one vs. one situations, I steered my Ice Attribute techniques to create as much mayhem as possible, just in case I had a need for that.

The white fire ablaze in my hands grows bigger as I absorb the particles of water attribute mana particles into my body. Using the last of my strength I cast my final skill.

"...Absolute Zero."

The Elderwood Guardian, who was in the form of a giant wave of entangled vines, rapidly turned into ice as the very atoms that made up the mana beast froze in place where the White Fire spread. The black lightning traced through the frozen tsunami of vines and instantly shattered it, leaving only the beast's mana core.

Cough

The second phase wears off as I cough out blood, my body falling down along with the shimmering fragments of ice that once made up the legendary S class mana beast.

The last thing I hear is the distant echo of Sylv's voice in my head.



"GAHHHHH!" The intense pain that shocks me awake leaves a stream of tears down my cheeks. I hurl both blood and the remains of the little food I had since I arrived in the dungeon as every muscle, every pore, every fiber of my body felt like it was getting sawed slowly by a jagged blade.

Fuck.

"You're awake!" My body doesn't stop trembling from the pain and I ignore the worried voice.

"G-glove. My glove." I manage to cough out in between my cries of pain and the blood that keeps leaking out of my mouth.

"What about your glove?" I see Elijah's face over mine now as he takes off the glove my

parents gave me from my hand.

"B-break one of the c-crystals on the glove and give... me." I almost pass out from the pain again, but before I do, Elijah manages to understand my stuttered instructions.

A surge of pleasant soothing light envelops my body, and the once unbearable pain eases enough so I can calm down a little. I try to get up but my body refuses to listen. Lying still on my back, I finally try to assess the situation, as my cognitive abilities aren't completely focused on enduring the pain anymore.

Around us was dark and cramped, with the only source of light coming from a small fire in the middle.

"Where's Jasmine?" I can move my neck at most, and I'm reminded of a very similar situation when I first fell from the cliff when I was four.

Oh man... good times.

"She's over there." I barely lift my head enough to see Jasmine laying against the other end the dark cramped place we were in. It's evident she's not doing so well as I hear her groaning while beads of sweat were streaming down her small face.

"She was hit a lot harder by Lucas' spell and her body wasn't willed with mana like yours. I had a medical kit on me so I treated the external burn on her belly but I suspect the burn to have caused some internal damage." Elijah shakes his head while straightening his glasses.

I could see he wasn't in a great shape himself. His tidy black hair was all over the place, like he just woke up and he had multiple bruises and cuts on his face.

I feel my face burn when I think about that traitorous twerp, Lucas.

"Use my glove on Jasmine. Crack another one of the gems on it and press it against her wounds." I mutter out as the strength on my neck gives out and I'm stuck looking at the dark roof of wherever we were.

"Got it." Elijah shuffles over to where Jasmine was and I hear a faint hum from the light that surrounded Jasmine.

Jasmine's ragged breathing is noticeably steadier now and using my limited strength

to look at her again, I see that her strained face was now calm.

"I think she'll be fine with a couple hours of rest." A rare smile escapes from Elijah's stern face.

'Papa! You're awake now! Are you okay? I'm almost there!' Sylvie's voice chirps in my head.

'I'm fine for now. I thought you said you had to finish up something... are you done with that?' I quiz my infant dragon.

"...No. I'm almost done though! I'll find you after I'm done! I miss you Papa... 'The disappointed voice of Sylvie almost tempts me to just tell her to come here, but I hold it in. I could feel the changes in Sylvie's body somehow and I knew she was going through something important.

"I didn't think that the legendary masked swordsman, aka Note, would be someone around my age." My bespectacled companion's voice stirs my train of thought.

"My mask!" My voice turns a little frantic as I notice for the first time that I wasn't wearing the mask Vincent got me.

"S-sorry. It got blown off while you were falling. I couldn't help looking while I was moving you two to safety." I see him scratch his cheek, embarrassed.

"What about my sword? Did you see the black stick that I carried around?" My eyes dart around through the dim lighting.

My eyes catch the outline of my sword as Elijah points a bit to the right of the sleeping Jasmine. "Yeah, it's besides Jasmine. I didn't know if it was valuable or not but I kept it just in case."

"Sigh... Thank you... for everything. For saving Jasmine and me and retrieving my sword when you could've easily escaped by yourself. Thank you." I just let out a deep breath, as if a weight has been lifted.

"Haha... If I left you, that would've put me on the same level as that traitor Lucas then, wouldn't it." He shoots me a grin

"Heh... you're right." I let out a pained laugh too.

Elijah inches closer, sitting down next to me now. "Why did you stay anyways? I saw Jasmine pulling you to escape. I feel like you two could've escaped at that time."

I can't help but pause at his question. "A King never betrays the people who trust him!" I smile which makes him scoff. "I promised someone very important to become a better person and to cherish the people around me." I simply say.

"Pfft. You sound like an old man. We're pretty young... I wonder what kind of life you had until now to have someone promise you that." Elijah's serious face was a lot more natural now, his stone face full of life.

"I sometimes wonder myself haha. How long have I been out for anyways?" I change the subject.

"It's hard to tell but definitely more than a day. Jasmine woke up a couple of times in between but just barely so I could feed her." He just answers, leaning back on the wall.

I inch myself painfully to sit up against the wall as well, Elijah helping me, when I notice that the wall was made of metal.

"This doesn't seem to be naturally made. Where are we?" I feel the cold surface of the wall, tracing it back to the ground.

"I conjured it. I think the Elderwood Guardian's body was supporting the whole level of the cave we were in. After you defeated it, the ground crumbled and once you landed on the ground, I built a small shelter to keep the rocks from burying us alive." He lets out a sigh. Until now, he didn't let out a single trace that he was a deviant, and a rather particular one at that.

Instead of being surprised though, my mind somehow felt at ease, as if the doubts that I had of him have been somewhat revealed to me. "I thought only Dwarves were only able to manipulate metal... and even then, I was taught that Dwarves could only manipulate existing metal, not create and conjure it."

"So much for keeping secrets eh?" Elijah chuckles, sinking further down, a tired look on his face.

"Haha, tell me about it." I laugh too, holding in the pain as my body protests to even the slightest movements. "All right... but you have to tell me what the hell you did back there as well. Your hair turned white! A-and your eyes... they were glowing purple. There were these glowing runes that appeared on your body too!" He quivers at the scene that unfolded before him.

I just nod in agreement and let him continue.

"I am from the Darv Kingdom, but I'm not really sure where I came from. The elder that took care of me since I was little always avoided the subject of my parents so I never got a clear answer. About a year ago when I awakened, I created such a big implosion that my whole room just vanished. After getting trained for a little, I found out I was abnormally better in earth attribute spells than any other elements... like, to the point where I wouldn't be able to cast anything but the most elementary spells in water, fire, or wind... even now." Elijah is staring blankly at the palm of his hands.

"Since I awakened, my mana core has been condensing all on its own at a rapid pace. I don't even need to meditate for some reason. The elder that took care of me sent me to the Kingdom of Sapin as a representative and told me to make a name for myself and get along with the humans, but honestly, I don't know why I'm doing this. After I broke into the dark orange stage, I had this weird feeling surge up in my body and before I knew it, a field of metal spikes conjured around me. I happened to be alone when it occurred so thankfully I didn't kill anyone... but ever since then... I've been scared. Scared of what I am and scared of what I can do. I was excited at first about how strong I could be, but right now, I can barely control my powers. You know... I thought maybe I was a half dwarf at one point but I-I just don't know what I am anymore."

I look at Elijah, noticing that his hands were trembling as he quickly squeezed it into fists to control himself.

"..." I just lay back, silently. I'm not going to pretend like I understand him and any words I say now would just be empty words of comfort.

"Sometimes, I get this feeling... Like what I can do right now isn't even the limit. I know it may sound weird but I get this nagging feeling that there's something more to me, and that once I can control that power, I'll know what I really am..... I'm sorry haha... this ended up being a therapy session for me hasn't it?" The bespectacled boy that tried so hard to keep a stern, cold façade turned out to be fragile on the inside.

I grit my teeth, as I will my screaming body to sit upright to face Elijah. Staring into Elijah's eyes, I see a trace of desperation but also gentleness and a firm pride in himself that reassures my decision. Years of being a King, representing my country, meeting all different kinds of people, I got the hang of being able to see the type of person someone was, and my impression of Elijah was that he could be a very loyal friend.

"I'm a Quadra Elemental Augmenter with two deviances: Ice and Lightning." I simply state without hiding anything.

Before he has the chance to even react to the landmine I set off, I continue. "I'm also a Beast Tamer. What you saw back there was me activating my beast will."

The hand that was supporting Elijah up as he leaned back against the metal wall he conjured slipped and he hit his head against the cold hard steel.

"Holy... *THUMP* Ouch!" He gets back up, rubbing his head.

"I thought I was a freak but I guess you win. W-wait... how old are you?" He asks.

"I turned 11 a couple of months ago."

"No way! I'll be 12 in a couple of months! I don't know my exact birthdate but the Elder just made my birthday into the day he found me, January 10th. You know my name is Elijah, but I don't know yours. What's your name?" He sticks out his hand as a sign of friendship.

Grasping his hand with my own shaking hand, I respond with a smile. "Arthur. Arthur Leywin, but just call me Art."

For the next several hours, we exchanged stories. Elijah's childhood wasn't that eventful before his awakening. He stayed with the elder since the dwarf children didn't seem too fond of mingling with humans. Because of that, Elijah just spent most of his time reading various books. Listening to him talk and just hearing about his life, I could understand why he was a lot more mature for someone his age. He only talked with adults, mostly the elder that took care of him, and just living in a society where almost everyone would rather not have anything to do with you made him grow up a lot faster than he should have.

I broke the last gem of the glove to relieve the pain again when Jasmine woke up. As soon as her eyes open and she saw I was awake, she shot up and gave me a long hug. I

could feel her tears as they fell on me.

"I'm sorry I couldn't protect you..." was all she could manage to say while she was holding back her sobs.

"It's okay Jasmine. I was the one being stubborn. I'm sorry I dragged you into this mess with me." I pat her back. Was she always this small?

This body was now a bit past 11 but I was considered tall for my age. I'm about the same height as the petite Jasmine, which I never noticed until now. Growing up with her made me think that she'd always be bigger than me.

"Let's go home guys." I announce as both Jasmine and Elijah support me from both sides.

Chapter 34 Rash Actions and Limits

With both Jasmine and Elijah supporting my powerless body, we managed to make our way back to the surface of the dungeon, where we fought the Elderwood Guardian. The once serene field of grass was in chaos as the floor had fissures and the trees were sunken.

"Let's look for anyone who might've made it out. If not, at least a body to bury for their family." I state, looking around at the mess around us.

Elijah shakes his head at this though. "Reginald and Brald were both frozen together with the mana beast from the last attack you used. I wasn't close enough to save Samantha either, after she got knocked off of you and landed near the Elderwood Guardian. I conjured a metal shelter to keep her safe from the debris but I'm not sure if she made it."

Amongst the pain of the recoil from using the second phase and worrying about Jasmine, I'm a bit ashamed to say that I didn't really think about the rest of the party. I guess when I didn't see anyone else in the shelter with us; I automatically assumed they didn't make it.

"Earth's Pulse. Scan!" Elijah kneels down and places both hands on the ground. After initiating the spell, a pulse ran throughout the whole cave and from Elijah's facial expression, I knew he found something.

"Samantha is still alive!" Elijah muttered a spell and rectified Samantha, who was buried inside the metal shelter he set up to protect her from the debris.

A sleek metallic tent rose from the ground and opened up in front of us to reveal the sorry state that Samantha was in.

Both her legs were broken in multiple places from where the Elderwood's tendrils grabbed her and the rest of her body was cut up and bruised. Her legs had bones sticking out and from the color the wounds were turning, it was no doubt infected.

Jasmine rushes towards her and kneels down. "Samantha, can you hear me? Everything is over. We'll get you home. Hold on."

Throughout the dungeon journey, Samantha, being the only other girl besides Jasmine, made numerous attempts to hold conversations with her. Her peppy personality was the exact opposite of Jasmine, but Jasmine eventually started talking to her more, even smiling at times.

Samantha's face was pale and she was sweating profusely. I was going through my head how everyone was going to get home. Both Samantha and I were a liability that would slow down everyone.

Just as I was about to suggest that Elijah and Jasmine go back up first with Samantha, a noise makes me jump.

"ROOAAAAARR!"

"What's going on now?" Elijah jumps too and he's aiming his wand at wherever the noise was coming from.

'Papa! I'm here!'

"Wait! Hold on Elijah, it's okay!" I calm down Elijah before he can shoot off his spells.

I know that I said it's okay, but when Sylvie lands in front of us, I have a hard time keeping calm myself.

"S-Sylv... you sure grew... a lot." I manage to stammer out.

Sylvie, the small cat-like dragon that always sat on top of my head was now almost the spitting image of the dragon I named her after.

Her body wasn't as big as Sylvia's, but it was still around 8 meters long. I could now say with full confidence that Sylvie was indeed a dragon. Her scales were obsidian black, reflecting the light from the dungeon in an almost divine way. The two horns that she has are sharper and even more menacing than the titan's horns I saw years ago. She had wings very similar to Sylvia's, with pitch-black bladed feathers. The red spikes that she had on her back and tail weren't there for some reason, but the scales along the ridges of her spine protruded making her appear even fiercer. Sylvie's limbs were strong, armored with spikes at the elbow and knees and with sharp claws jutting

out of her paws. Sylvie's once adorable face was now filled with elegance and poise, from her black sclera and yellow irises; her eyes remind me of yellow jewels amidst the night sky. She lands in front of us and she brings her snout close to my face.

Lick

The power of her tongue licking up my face lifts me from the ground and leaves me wet with her saliva.

"OW! Sylvie careful... I'm hurt!" I weakly say on the ground.

'Hehe sorry Papa.' "GROOOAAAAWR"

"D-d-d-dragon... It's a dragon!" Elijah's in a daze now and keeps rubbing his eyes to see if he's hallucinating, while even Jasmine, who knew that Sylv was a dragon, was slack-jawed.

"Elijah, this is my bond, Sylvie." I reach my hand out to rub my dragon's snout when her hind leg starts thumping the ground she coos in pleasure.

Pfft... she's still the same Sylvie.

I face him now, putting on a serious face. "Jasmine already knows about this, but I want you to promise me to keep this a secret. The fact that you know Sylvie is a dragon means you know yourself how rare she is and what it would mean if her existence came into light."

Elijah just nods frantically, his glasses crooked and hanging loose on his nose.

"We need to hurry though. It worked out well that Sylvie came when she did. Let's move Samantha on Sylvie's back." I can now barely stand up on my own now, but walking more than a few steps was out of the question.

I watched as Elijah and Jasmine carefully loaded the still unconscious Samantha onto Sylv's back before they helped me do the same.

It was decided that only Samantha and I would ride Sylv to the beginning cave of the dungeon while Jasmine would carry Elijah and follow close behind.

The journey back up only took a couple of hours compared to the full day we needed

when we travelled down.

'Sylv... can you still transform?' I couldn't help but ask on the way back up. It would be a lot harder to have her be with me if she could only stay in this form. Thankfully, it seemed that she still had the ability to change into her miniature shape.

'What did you do during this time anyway? How did you grow up so quickly?' I sent Sylv while lying down against her long neck.

'I hunted a lot of monsters and ate their mana cores! I missed you a lot Papa but I felt like I had to do this when we got here.' Her wings created another gust of wind when she flapped down, speeding up towards our destination.

It seemed like her body wasn't able to grow without the help of consuming mana cores, which reminded me of the mana core the Elderwood Guardian dropped.

I cursed at myself. Even if I didn't use it for myself, that would've been an invaluable asset to hold onto just in case.

When we arrived to the cave where the batrunners were, I was preparing myself to fight a couple of them in this crippled state, but to my surprise, when the batrunners saw Sylvie, they were so scared, they just buried their heads in the ground off in the opposite corner of the cave.

When Jasmine arrived an hour later, Sylvie's body glowed and she shrank into the size of a kitten. Her appearance changed from before; her red spikes were gone and she was pitch black aside from the yellow slits of her irises. Her wings weren't visible in this form and after her transformation was over, she just reminded me of a demonic black kitten.

"Cough!" Samantha stirred awake as she winced from the pain her legs gave her.

"Y-you guys all made it." She gave us a weak smile, her lips cracking in the process.

"Stop talking, you need to save your energy. We'll get you to a hospital soon."

"L-look what I found~" Ignoring my nagging, she slowly reaches inside her robe and pulls out my mask and a dull green stone.

"The beast core!" Elijah looks excitedly at the item that would be worth fortunes as

Samantha drops the items in my hands.

"Thank you." I give her a smile and Samantha sinks back into sleep.

Putting on the mask, I turn to my guardian. "Jasmine, I want you and Elijah to go first to Guild Hall and get help back down here. I'll stay here with Samantha."

The both of them nod and head out. It'll take them a couple more hours for them to go back there and come back. During this time, I'll absorb the Elderwood's beast core. With that, and the fact that I assimilated my body with Sylvia's Will, I should be able to make more than a full recovery.

Before I start meditating, I take out the parchment I got from the Twin Horns and record a message, telling my parents that I was fine and that I'll be coming home soon.

I sat cross-legged and took a deep breath before absorbing the mana from the Elderwood's beast core, all the while thinking of what I should do with Lucas.

I didn't want to just settle for petty revenge. I wanted to do something more. He was from a very powerful family of notorious mages and his blood made him have a certain amount of protection from the elves. Of course with my connections with the royal family, I don't think it would matter much but the Wykes family that he was a part of could make things complicated.

They arrived sooner than I anticipated because after only a couple of hours of meditation, I hear the footsteps of people coming this way.

By the uniforms the people that came in were wearing, I could tell that they were the medics Jasmine and Elijah were able to bring. Among the group of medics was Kaspian, who was sending out orders to medics and a couple Guild workers.

Hiding the mana core I didn't finish absorbing, I watched as the medics worked on Samantha. They used a mixture of herbs to anesthetize her and were pushing back the bones into the right place. The field of medicine wasn't that advanced in this world so I wasn't sure that they would be able to fully heal Samantha's legs, but I was relieved when I saw an Emitter amongst them.

Kaspian walked towards me and I stood up. "Good Evening Mr. Note. I didn't expect for us to be meeting like this. Ms. Flamesworth has told me the situation and I know how you must feel."

"Oh do you now? Then would you kindly inform me the current location of Lucas so that I may properly respond to his actions against our party?" I say through gritted teeth. My fists were clenched by the tone Kaspian was talking in because I knew he came here for the purpose of warning me to stay away from him.

"I must advise you Mr. Note that you should not take action against Mr. Wykes... right now." He shakes his head, confirming my assumption.

"And why not 'right now'? My identity is a secret and I have the capability to easily erase that bug's existence. Do you think you have the power to protect him from me?" My eyes coldly stare straight into the thin man.

"Of course I know I don't possess the power to fight against you when you're at your full strength Mr. Note but I assure you that I can pose a threat to you now." He straightens his glasses. "But even if I could, I wouldn't need to. Mr. Note, I am warning you because believe it or not, I do carry the obligation to care for you since you are affiliated with Mrs. Flamesworth, even if she is the estranged daughter of the house. The Wykes are the type of people that will carry out revenge in the most extreme manner. Assuming that you do kill their precious Lucas Wykes, I know right now, you do not possess the power to kill the whole Wykes house. Even if they don't know your identity, that won't stop them from killing anyone that had anything to do with you. This includes Mrs. Flamesworth and the people who she's affiliated with, the Twin Horns. Going further than that, I believe the Wykes will further their revenge against you by going against all of the people close to the Twin Horns party, which includes Reynolds Leywin and his family."

At that, I knew Kaspian at least had a suspicion of who I was. I don't know how he managed to figure it out, but from his gaze, I knew that he was on to something.

"Like I said Mr. Note. I wish to be on your side. What I said about the Wykes family is all from previous events in the past so I can assure you that they will stop at nothing from wiping out anyone that had to do with you, even if it they aren't directly related. Until the day you hold the power and authority to protect the people you care for from them, I must advise you from acting against them for now. With that, I will now take my leave. The Adventurer, Samantha, must be taken back to a facility to be properly cared for." Giving me a curt bow, we walk away towards Samantha, leaving me with a bitter taste in my mouth.

I could only laugh at the pitiful state I was in. He was right. Until I could wipe away the

whole Wykes house, it would be dangerous for my family and friends if I act against them. No matter how much of an asshole he was, it wasn't worth risking my loved ones.

Through clenched fists, I swore to myself that Lucas would regret this day.

Elijah and Jasmine both put a sympathetic hand on my shoulder and I just nodded back at them.

We arrived in the Guild Hall located on the outskirts of the Beast Glades a couple hours later. Samantha was now resting in the recovery facility and Jasmine, Elijah and I were resting on couches in a back room. Kaspian was moved from his office in Xyrus to this place and was seated behind his desk when the door opens.

"You guys managed to make it out alive!" Behind a group of what looked like guards was Lucas.

Kaspian literally face-palms at Lucas' audacity and eyes me to remember what we talked about.

Elijah and Jasmine both get up from their seat and stare daggers at him, unsheathing their weapons while I remain seated. It took all that I had in me to rush in and kill the brat who betrayed us and was stupid enough to come here and mock us further.

I don't know if it was because he was stupid or confident that he dared show himself in front of us, but I knew he was somewhat weary since he had a group of pretty powerful mages as guards who also had their weapons unsheathed in defense against my two companions.

"I wonder how you managed to escape from the beast. Did you have to sacrifice someone else to save yourselves? Samantha is a cripple now and I don't see Brald... don't tell me you sacrificed hi..."

A high-pitched screech was emitted from the tip of my index and middle fingers as a thin beam of condensed lightning shot out at Lucas.

I got the idea for this technique from my previous world. Using electromagnetism to create a condensed laser, it was a deadly attack but it did leave my hand numb for a couple of minutes because my own body wasn't able to handle to force needed to create it.

Before anyone could even react, the thin beam pierced through Lucas' left ear, erasing his left earlobe completely.

Holding in the urge to groan from the shock my own body felt from even the tiny beam, I face Lucas whose smug face was nowhere to be seen. "Before I make a hole in somewhere more important, you should leave and realize that your family can't protect you for long."

The guards realized after seeing Lucas' ear that I somehow attacked him and instantly had their weapons against me when I got up and stared at them.

The elite guards that were protecting Lucas instinctively took a step back as their hands started shaking from fear. They were trained veterans that have killed and knew that, right now, their lives were in danger.

"Now now! Mr. Lucas, it wasn't wise for you to show yourself like this. Let us leave it at this." Kaspian ushered the group out the door, heaving a big sigh before facing me.

"You've controlled yourself the best you could today but I'm afraid you've made enemies with one of the strongest houses in the Kingdom of Sapin." He shakes his head.

"That's fine. He won't take action from what happened today. Despite his conceited attitude, Lucas is cautious. He knows that, right now, if he doesn't go against me, I won't do anything."

I get up, Sylvie, who was next to me, stirs awake and Samantha and Elijah follow behind me. It was time to go home.

Today's silence isn't my weakness. It was just the beginning for my revenge.

Chapter 35

Precautions

KASPIAN BLADEHEART'S POV:

After getting back to my seat to sort out the paperwork piled up, I look up to see that the masked Adventurer, Note, has come back by himself. Closing the door behind him, his baritone voice whispers in a barely audible voice.

"Mr. Bladeheart... I remember you saying that you would truly like to help me?"

The faint voice I hear through his mask sends a chill down my spine, as if every fiber of my body is screaming at me 'danger'.

Ignoring my body's protest, I put on stoic face, straightening my glasses before responding. "Yes. Your close connection to Mrs. Flamesworth as well as your own personal potential has been viewed favorably upon by the Guild.

"...I see."

The Adventurer, who's identity, or even age, I could not guess, was pondering before he looked back up. I know he was somehow connected to the Leywin household but even thorough background searches have turned out fruitless.

"I plan to take a very extensive break from being an Adventurer Kaspian, so I would like to ask you for a favor."

"Please continue..." I respond after his slight pause, my curiosity aroused.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

There were some things to get settled before we were allowed to leave the Guild Hall. For one, Lucas was to be stripped of his Adventurer's license and all of its benefits. That was the reason we saw him today; he had to be fully denounced of his position

and stature as an A class Adventurer in front of a couple high-rank guild workers.

"...I hereby declare Conjurer Adventurer, Lucas Wykes, stripped of his A-class ranking for indirectly causing the death and almost fatal injury of his party members during a dungeon excursion. Intentional betrayal of fellow party members will, furthermore, prohibit him from becoming an Adventurer until otherwise stated by the Guild. You may now hand in your card." The stern, elderly judge bangs the gavel, creating a loud echo too long to be natural.

This whole time, the noble half-elf brat had a look stitched on his face as if he's swallowed a live frog, his eyes jutting back and forth between the judge and I, confused why I was with him in trial.

I could tell he was shocked by the direct retaliation from me, one that he couldn't even react to. When he heard that we were alive, he was under the assumption that we somehow escaped from the Elderwood Guardian, not kill it. Now, his once confident gaze was filled with doubt as he's obviously pondering what really happened down there.

That seed of doubt I just planted was something I meant to do, one that would make him more cautious. The skill "Railgun" I used on him was instant and tore a hole through his earlobe. After experiencing such a fast defeat, it would lead to thoughts of whether he could defend himself against me in the future.

The skill I used was rather just a flashy one, one that served its purpose. The Railgun generated between my fingertips seemed to be deadly and casted instantly, but that wasn't the truth. In order to generate enough power to essentially shoot a laser beam like that would take time and also create a much stronger recoil. The flashy beam I casted instantly was more of a condensed beam of light. The real reason I was able to tear a hole through him, and why I chose his earlobe was because I just threw a sharp fragment of my metal button at him, hidden by the harmless light beam.

While even the harmless condensed light that probably had enough power to only partially numb his ear did actually have a backlash on me, the high-pitched sound and the lightning aftereffect were an act that hopefully instilled a deep enough fear into the boy.

"Next to be put on trial is Augmenter Adventurer, Note. Faced with the clear enmity with Lucas Wykes and possibly the whole Wykes household displayed by the act of

aggression against Lucas Wykes, I hereby declare temporary ban from Xyrus City during the whole duration of Lucas Wykes' attendance at Xyrus Academy." The gavel once again boomed throughout the small room, while the various shadows of Guild workers nodded in agreement and murmured amongst themselves.

Putting on my best angry voice, I lean forward on the podium. "Sir! I object to this punishment! Why am I to be reprimanded for Lucas' betrayal at the dungeon?" I slam my fists down to further my point. All the while, Lucas's cautious face turns smug and I could see the slight smirk on his face as he looks away from the judge.

I knew revoking his license didn't mean much to him and with me "out of the way", he didn't have to worry about anything.

"Enough! We are aware of the circumstances, which is why we chose not to revoke your license, when normally, using spells inside the Guild Hall would be more than enough reason to. You will be allowed to continue being an Adventurer, as long as we do not catch you near Mr. Wykes or his family." The judge's stern face becomes even sharper as his gaze pierces through my mask.

"Wait! What about his identity sir? Wouldn't he be able to easily take his mask off and slip through inside the city and potentially harm me or my family?" Lucas shoots his hand up and eyes me victoriously.

"We have already decided to have his identity recorded once this sentencing is over Mr. Wykes. You will not be allowed to know of Mr. Note's identity for obvious reasons while select Guild Hall members will keep tabs on Mr. Note's whereabouts, masked or not. This is not up for debate. This sentencing is over." The judge declares and walks out before either of us have the chance to refute.

"Tch!" Lucas just walks out, escorted by his guards after he hands back his Adventurer card and gives me one last glance. "I hope you know what's good for you and stay away from me."

Ignoring the threat of the prepubescent Conjurer, I am escorted into the back room by several guards, following behind the judge and Guild workers.

Once the door closes behind me, the guards release their grip on my arms and the stern judge lets out a sigh.

"I trust that this little charade was to your satisfaction Mr. Note?" His sharp white

eyebrows twitch a little.

"Thank you Judge for your participation in this." I give a slight bow.

Shaking his head, giving me a helpless look. "No need. It is not on your behalf that I did this. I sincerely hope that I could trust that you will not cause any trouble after this. We will not be able to hide the truth from the Wykes family forever but as long as you do not go against them, they will not bother with you."

"I understand. Kaspian mentioned to me a passageway where I can safely remove my "identity", is that correct?" I look around the dim room.

"Yes, your acquaintances are waiting for you on the other side." The judge fumbles around with a couple of the books on the shelf and suddenly a passage opens up from the ground.

"I bid you farewell Mr. Note and I do hope that you won't cause us further trouble with the Wykes house." Giving a curt nod, I exaggerate a salute to the guards and the judge, as well as the other Guild workers before entering the passageway.

Opening the door on the other side, I'm greeted by a head-butt from Sylv.

"Kyu!" 'How did everything go Papa? Is it over now? Can we go home?"

The only other people that greeted me were Jasmine and Elijah. "Everything is over. Let's go back home guys." Sylv hops onto my head.

After taking a couple of steps, Elijah asks, "Did you not want to visit Samantha?"

"I think it'll be better I don't visit her. Jasmine, maybe you should stop by the hospital next time to check up on her?" Jasmine was silent the whole time but she looks at me and nods.

During the discussion of future plans, Elijah looked a little disheartened, not saying much throughout the way.

We were still on the border of The Beast Glades so getting access to the teleportation portal to Xyrus would be the next order of things.

"Well, I guess we should split ways here right?" Scratching his untidy black hair, he

looks at Jasmine and I with a weak smile.

"Huh? You're not going to come with us, Elijah? Did you have something you needed to do?" I assumed he would be coming with us to Xyrus but thinking through, I should've realized he might have his own plans.

"W-what? I didn't really have anything planned but is it really okay to come along with you?" He straightens his glasses and coughs, trying to cover his embarrassed face.

"Well you and Jasmine should go separately through the portal from me in case anyone suspects something but I thought it' be good for you to stay with us for a bit before we go to school." I shoot him a grin.

"W-we? I don't understand. I never had plans to go to school." He looks lost now so I stop teasing and go straight for the point.

"I've been thinking a lot after the dungeon. You said your goal is to make a name for yourself in this kingdom... right?" I put my arm over his neck.

Elijah just silently nods, still pondering what I've been planning.

"...Well! What better way to make yourself known by graduating from the most prestigious school in Sapin!" I exclaim.

Elijah's bespectacled eyes widen and even Jasmine looks surprised by my idea. "But... how would I even get into the school? I mean... I might have the qualifications but not the background. Even the fact that I'm from Darv doesn't give me any leeway into the school."

"Lucky for you, I think I can give you that background. This big brother here can give you the opportunity to get you into the school. So how 'bout it?" I chuckle while I still have my arm around his neck.

"Pfft! What big brother. You do realize I'm older than you right? Anyway... I'm still not sure about this." Elijah just throws a light jab to my ribs.

"You know... Lucas is going to be attending Xyrus Academy. You're not going to leave me there alone with him are you?" I squeeze him harder this time.

"I agree with Ar... Note. You can always go back to being an Adventurer later." Jasmine

looks around to see if anyone heard the mistake she almost slipped out.

"Alright alright! IF you can somehow get me in, I'll go! Besides, someone's going to have to hold you back from murdering Lucas on the first day of school!" The serious face that Elijah had lightens up as he smiles.

"Good! Jasmine, can you take Elijah back to the Helstea house? I have something I need to do first. I'll catch up to you guys!" I push them in the direction to the portal that was still a good distance ahead.

Jasmine nods and leads Elijah away. After they were out of sight, my face turns serious underneath my mask and both Sylvie and I turn to our left.

"Come out." I utter calmly.

With a swish, Kaspian appears next to us.

"I am glad you took some precautions by sending the two of them away first." He simply nods.

"Thank you for getting the judge to play along in that act. I'm sure Lucas isn't going to be on guard anytime soon." I say.

"It is my pleasure. I am glad that it was solved without anyone dying." He stares at me, implying the obvious.

I just shrug my shoulders as I walk away. "I advise you to take some more precautions Mr. Note. You have gotten over the hardest part but please do not let your guard down."

Without looking back, I wave at Kaspian, heading towards the teleportation gate myself.

Elijah attending school won't draw too much suspicion. Jasmine was close with the Helstea family now so having her vouch for Elijah will be natural. I made sure not to draw Dawn's ballad whenever I was with Lucas on the journey. The only problem that may arise is from Sylvie.

Lucas has seen the small, feline form of Sylvie back at Guild Hall. Before I had the chance to even ask Sylvie, her body begins to glow.

Her pitch black scale turns white as the horns that she had disappears completely. The lizard-like tail that she had grows as the scales stick out. After the glow died down, I blink to make sure I wasn't seeing things. The feline-lizard form that he was in is nowhere in sight as she now looks exactly like a fox. No scales at all and when I reach down to feel her, I notice that her fur wasn't exactly fur but scales that have been narrowed down and elongated to give the form of a pelt. Her body was completely snow white except for her nose, the tip of her ears and tail and her paws, which were the original black that she was.

"Kyu!" 'This is better right Papa?' Her size was the same so she jumps up onto my head and makes a bed out of my hair.

'The transformation made me tired. I'm going to sleep for a while Papa.'

"Y-yeah... sure Sylv." I should be used to these things by now but Sylv continues to baffle me. Did all dragons have the ability to alter their forms so completely? I know that her main form was that of a dragon, like the one we saw down at the dungeon, but being able to change her color and size even more wholly than her blackminiature form was astounding.

Well... that conveniently gets rid of that problem.

I send both a pulse to the ground and a weak electric current into the air to make sure I was by myself before I reached town. I take off my mask and coat, placing it inside my bag.

Since we were still on the edge of the Beast Glades and the Grand Mountains, reaching the small town, I noticed it was filled with only Adventurers and merchants trying to survive and make a living. There wasn't much to look at so I quickly sold my short sword, leaving me only with my black stick.

My last stop was the artifice. Opening the double doors, my vision is filled with various artifacts.

"Welcome to Ecvius Artifacts! Er... how may I help you?" A peppy young woman greeted me with a hint of confusion in her eyes as to why an eleven-year-old was all the way out here.

"Hi! I came here with my father who's a merchant. He asked me to buy something for him here." I flash an innocent smile.

"How cute! What is that small fox on your head?" She hops out from behind the counter to get a closer look at us. Sylvie was still sleeping so I just nonchalantly said that this infant mana beast was my father's.

"I see I see. So, what can I help you with?" She clasps her hands eagerly.

"I'm looking for a small dimensional storage artifact." Looking at her, I can tell she was shocked by what I just said.

Something I found while reading various books was that there is a special mineral located in this world capable of storing a couple times its size. None of the books went in depth about how it can do so, which tells me that they don't really know either, but it was supposedly extremely rare and valuable.

Quickly gaining her senses, she puts on a smile and leads me to a room behind the counter. "Here, we have all of our most valuable items. This wall, we have all of our dimensional items."

"I just need one big enough to store this." I reach for Dawn's Ballad that was strapped on my waist.

"Hmmm... if it's only that, I think this ring would do it." She says after looking through the shelves for a bit. After she picked out a small case, I looked to see it was an extravagant gold ring with a diamond imbedded into it, alongside other smaller gems.

"Err... do you have any that are less flamboyant?" I say while giving the ring back to her.

"Hmmm... most people ask for the flashiest jewelry when they ask for a dimensional storage artifact." Scratching her head, she looks through more of the shelves in the small back room.

"Aha! How about this?" I open the small box she hands me and inside was a dull silver band.

"This ring is actually of higher quality than the gold ring I showed you before, but the smith that forged this insisted on leaving the ring in this plain state. This ring probably has enough space to fit your stick and a large luggage bag inside." She says, flashing me a very business-like smile.

I didn't waste any time in my decision. "I'll take it."

After haggling with the insistent woman, I managed to buy it for a couple of beast cores that I picked up from the dungeon and 200 gold. This was only because that was about all I had left. My total savings now consisted of a couple of silver and the S class Elderbeast core that I have partly used. I sighed in depression, reminiscing of the times when I could live happily with just a couple of copper coins back in Ashber town. The 200 gold I received were from Guild and from Kaspian who, separately, gave me some to "take precautions with". After slipping the ring into my right thumb, since it was too big for any of my other fingers, I willed mana into both the ring and my sword. Instantly, the black sword glowed and got sucked up into the ring. I did the same with my mask and coat that was inside my bag and proceeded towards the teleportation gate.

Chapter 36 A Son, Brother, and Friend

I could never get used to the teleportation gate no matter how many times I go through it. The feeling of being stuck in a space where I had no control just didn't sit right with me.

Twiddling the dimension ring stuck on my thumb, I couldn't help but get a headache at how careful I would have to be once school started. Even the ring was bought so that I wouldn't' have to carry my sword around. While I never used my teal bladed sword as an Adventurer, I did have it sheathed on me at all times. Even Lucas eyed my black walking stick with curiosity while we were in the dungeon together.

Arriving at the other side of the gate in Xyrus, I heaved a big breath. I was home.

Catching a carriage home, I passed by the Academy that I'll be attending. The premise was enormous and just looking at it from outside, anyone could tell how much time and resources the Kingdom put into this place. It seemed like its own little world inside of the city, with various structures and landscapes changing along the way.

"Sir, we have arrived at Helstea Manor." The driver got off the front and opened the door for me, tipping his hat as I stepped off.

Handing him a couple of copper coins, I walked up the stairs I was so familiar with. Sylv was still sleeping. I was getting worried at how much a toll transforming her body like that took on her, but after prodding her mentally, I was relieved that she was still just sleeping very heavily.

"BOOM!" The double front doors flung open and the girl that came flying out was a sight for my sore eyes.

"BROTHER WELCOME BACK!!!" My sister, Ellie, head-butts me in the stomach, almost knocking the wind out of me as she clings on for dear life.

Rubbing her face into my shirt, I couldn't help but chuckle as I patted her head.

"Uuuu... you're not leaving anymore right? You're staying right?" Through teary eyes, my sister's almond colored iris shimmered in a mix of emotions.

Peeling myself away from Ellie, I squat down a little so I'm eye level with her.

"Yeah, I'm back Ellie." I give her my most sincere smile.

"EN!" She nods her head vigorously as if to say that I said the right answer. Ellie should be almost 8 now. Her birthday was a couple of months before mine so there's always a period where she's only 3 years younger than me. For most people, that wouldn't matter but for some odd reason, Ellie never fails to mention after her birthday that she's only 3 years apart. Looking at her carefully, I can tell she's blossoming into a cute young lady. Her puppy eyes became more prominent as she lost some of the baby fat in her face; her perky nose red from crying.

I started internally panicking a little for the near future when she would start dating. The day she brings home a boy would be the day I will unleash the full extent of my goddamn powers.

"Arthur!" My mother comes running forward alongside my father, both of who have an expression that seemed to smile and cry at the same time.

My father, who seemed to be getting more and more muscular, instantly picked me up.

"My boy! HAHA! You've grown so much!" My father's beard was a bit longer now and I can see some wrinkles near his eyes and mouth.

My mother grabs my hand and places it on her cheek, not saying anything except for a few quiet sobs.

"Idiot son! Do you know how worried I was when my ring activated? I thought you were dead!" She looks up at me and the angry face she tried to put on disappeared and was replaced with a bright, teary smile.

"Your mother couldn't sleep for days after the ring activated. I kept telling her that everything will be fine and that something just must've happened to your ring. I know my son wouldn't die that easily!" He tried to comfort me, but the guilt was still just as heavy.

Putting me down, my father continues, "Thankfully, the status on the masked

swordsman, or Note, was updated at Guild Hall, saying that you and your party arrived at the branch near the Beast Glades."

"I'm sorry Mom, Dad, Ellie for worrying you guys again. I seem to cause nothing but concerns for you guys haha." I scratch my head as my mother continues to hold onto my other hand with Ellie comforting her.

Shaking her head, my mother looks up at me. "It's a parent's job to worry about her children, although you seem to do your end of the bargain a little too well. Ellie was waiting by the window the whole day since your friend Elijah came with Jasmine."

"MOM!! That was supposed to be a secret!!" She started pouting while she started softly hitting our mother on the back, making us all start laughing.

"Arthur!" "Art!" I hear two voices. I look up at the top of the stairs and I see Elijah, and Vincent with Tabitha. The friend that I made in the dungeon came down first and put his arm around my neck, half strangling me as he puts his weight on top of me. "Took you long enough to get here! Jasmine already went back with the Twin Horns. Did you decide to go on a touring trip?" We both chuckled. Elijah seemed a lot more expressive these days, almost making me forget the nearly robotic face he had when I first saw him at the testing grounds.

"Arthur Leywin! The prodigious son is back!" Vincent clasps my back as he gives me as big of a bear hug as he can with his thin body.

"We're glad you're back safe, Arthur." Tabitha follows behind him and gives me a hug as well. The Helstea couple hasn't changed much and was as lively as ever.

"Thank you for taking care of my family Mr. Helstea, Mrs. Helstea." I smile and give a polite bow.

"Now now! You're going to make me angry if you stay so formal with us!" Vincent shakes his finger while pretending to be angry.

"He's right you know. Please, Arthur, your family is a part of our family. I hope you can just call us Aunt and Uncle." Tabitha gently strokes my head.

I nod and start looking around. There's one person missing from the Helstea family. Before I can ask, Vincent seems to have noticed who I was looking for.

"Hehe. If you're looking for Lily, she's not here." Vincent has a wicked grin on his face while Tabitha just rolls her eyes at him.

"Lily got accepted into Xyrus Academy thanks to you. She started attending last fall semester of the Academy after she turned 12." Tabitha also has a warm smile on her face.

My eyes widen at the good news. "Wow! My parents did mention it but Wow! Lily really did it! She' a student now!" I smile broadly.

Tabitha nods at this. "Yes. She really wanted to be here when you came back to tell you herself but unfortunately, spring semester started so she's stuck in the dorms until break."

Vincent laughs urging both our families and Elijah to the living room.

We discussed about my time as an Adventurer. There were some things I left out for my family's sake. I eyed Elijah when I skipped the part where Lucas betrayed us. I didn't want either my family or the Helstea family getting involved.

My sister was wide eyed the whole time while I was telling the time while Elijah and I were in the dungeon. She had the expression that I was telling her a fantasy bedtime story with all of the dungeon monsters and magic involved. The audience couldn't believe it when Elijah continued the story on for me and told them about how I defeated the Elderwood Guardian. My father and Vincent's jaws were slacked when I just shot them a grin and pulled out the core.

"Speaking of which. Dad, what stage are you at?" I asked.

Giving me an embarrassed chuckle, he says, "I've been stuck at the bottleneck of the dark orange stage since you left. No matter how much I meditate and purify mana, I can't seem to break through."

"Perfect. Dad, you should use this then. I had to use a little bit of it while I was healing but there should be enough in this beast core to help you break through." Without giving him a chance to decline, I toss him the dull green core.

"No. Arthur. This is something you fought for with your life. I can't just take this from you." My father tries to give me back the core when Vincent stops him.

"Reynolds, the boy must have his reasons. You're his father for God's sake. Get stronger, it'll help me as well haha!"

Tabitha just chuckled at this. "Alice, your son brought quite the present."

My mother just sighs helplessly while Ellie starts studying the dull green core in my father's hands.

"Dad, please take it and use it. You need to catch up to me." I look at my dad, trying to make light of the fact that I gave him something invaluable. After telling everyone that I was at the light orange stage, I received even more faces of shock, although not as much as it used to be. I guess they're grown accustomed to my abnormal talent.

Reluctantly, my father accepts it and puts it away in his pocket. The next order of things was about Elijah. He told everyone of his background already before I got there but I clarified that he was both a close friend, and a benefactor who saved both Jasmine's and my life. Continuing on, I turned to Vincent and asked if it was possible to enroll Elijah to Xyrus Academy.

After pondering for a bit, Vincent agreed to sponsor Elijah under the Helstea House to Xyrus Academy. Vincent excused himself first, saying that he was going to write a letter to Cynthia Goodsky, the Director of Xyrus Academy. My father went out into the backyard, saying he was going to start training immediately so it was just my mother, Ellie, Elijah, Tabitha and I.

My mother and Tabitha took turns asking me about more details while I was Adventuring and my mother insisted I take a checkup from her to make sure I didn't have any lasting wounds. I told her I was fine and that I used the glove she gave me to good use. She didn't seem too happy about the fact that I actually had to use it on myself but was just glad I was still in one piece.

I talked a bit more with my baby sister. She was curious as to why Sylvie changed appearance and why she was sleeping. After explaining that she was tired from the Adventure, I realized how drained I was.

"Mom, Aunt Tabitha, I think I'm going to head up with Elijah as well. I feel a bit tired from the journey." Elijah gets up after me.

"Of course. Don't forget to wash up before sleeping." My mother smiles at us.

"Goodnight Brother! Goodnight Elijah!" My sister chimes.

After excusing ourselves, Elijah and I head up to my room. "Elijah, you wash up first, I'm going to organize my things."

The maid brought the set of sleepwear I asked for and I placed it in front of the shower for Elijah.

"Dude! I'm naked!" Suddenly realizing that I had a full view of his 'Elijah junior' he covered his lower body with his hands.

"Pfft! Relax, I can't even make it out because of the steam." I just grin before leaving the bathroom.

Elijah comes out of the shower in the pajamas with his hair still wet and glasses fogged up.

"Your turn." He says while drying his hair with a towel.

The hot shower was bliss. I carefully cleaned Sylvie with the damp washcloth but it didn't seem to bother her at all, still not stirring awake from her slumber.

After both of us were clean, Elijah and I talked on my bed, Sylvie in my lap.

"Do you think we'll learn a lot at Xyrus Academy?" Elijah is trying hard to keep from smiling. It was obvious how happy he was to be going to school.

"Who knows? I imagine it'll be a little boring no? Both of us are well above the skill level of the first years there." I shrug.

Elijah continues, "But there will be people from all those powerful houses. I imagine there will be a few who can be on my level right? I'm really excited to learn how to start controlling my powers. I'm glad that Xyrus has a lot of famous mages to learn from."

"Yeah. I think it'll be useful learning more about Lightning and Ice attribute skills." I look down at my hands. These hands have grown a lot faster than I imagined. Just a few years ago, my hands were that of an infant, but it was now a lot bigger and it'll continue to grow, just like my powers. I couldn't help getting excited as well at the future to come.

Elijah interrupts my train of thought. "So what are you going to do about Lucas?"

I grow serious. "Lucas has no idea who I am and until I'm confident that I can confront his whole house, I'll have it stay that way for the time being. I need to train harder than before."

"Well you know you can count me in. Lucas is probably going to have it out for me when he sees me but he doesn't think too much of me. I can't believe that jerk tried to sacrifice us so that he could escape." Elijah's fists turn white as he trembles from anger.

"I know. He's going to pay for everything he did, but no matter what, we can't act against him yet." I lay down on the right side of the bed, placing Sylvie, who was curled up, by my pillow.

Elijah lies down on the other side of the bed. After a few moments of silence, he turns his head my way.

""

"Hey Art. Do you think I'll find a girlfriend at Xyrus?"

"Pfft! THAT's what you were thinking of right now?" I get into a fit of laughter while Elijah blushes a deep red and starts kicking me from his side of the bed. "I'm being totally serious man! I hope there are a lot of pretty girls at Xyrus." He sighs.

"For such a serious looking guy, you sure worry about normal things. Don't worry. There will be plenty of rich pretty spoiled brats at Xyrus to take your pick from. Just wow them with your metal magic haha!"

"Screw you! I bet you won't have trouble being popular, with your prince-like features... And you know I have trouble controlling my magic." He turns away so his back is facing me.

"Don't worry Elijah. We still have more than half a year until school starts. I'll help you get better control of your mana manipulation before then." I state.

After a brief pause, Elijah mutters a soft thank you without turning. What a shy boy.

"Goodnight perv. If you start coming unto me while you dream about a cute girl, I swear I'll shock you." I laugh, turning away as well.

"Pfft, don't worry. Goodnight." He retorts.

My mind, which was once filled with various thoughts on the future, starts going blank as I nod off to sleep.

Chapter 37 In the Meantime

A dim ray of the rising sun managed to peek through a gap in the curtains right into my eyes waking me up rather pleasantly. These days, Elijah or Ellie usually wake me up so it's been a while since I've gotten up before either of them.

Sylvie, she ended up sleeping for 4 days straight before waking up. She explained to me how changing her body like that takes quite a long time to recover from, and she wasn't able to do it often.

It was only a little past dawn so the manor that was always bustling with maids and Ellie was still very peaceful except for the few cooks in the kitchen getting ready for the day. Not bothering to wash up, I made my way to the backyard where I felt fluctuations in the mana. As expected, my father was busy training, absorbing the S class beast core I retrieved from the dungeon.

Not wanting to disturb his training, I found a place to sit next to him and I began studying his aura. My father, Reynolds Leywin, ex party member of the Twin Horns, was stuck at a bottleneck, not able to overcome past the dark orange stage. I've spent a lot of time overlooking the mana circulation in my father's body, as well as Elijah's.

As expected, Elijah's mana veins, the veins responsible for absorbing mana from the surrounding atmosphere, were incredibly wide. My father, on the other hand, as an Augmenter, had much more developed mana channels, the arteries that allowed diverse distribution of mana throughout the body.

"Ah you're up early today Son. Why didn't you say anything?" My father got up, wiping the sweat off of his face and neck with a towel he had on his lap.

"I didn't want to disturb your training Dad. How are things going?" I get up too and start stretching.

"I just finished absorbing the rest of the beast core, but for some reason, the core didn't crumble." He hands back the S class core to me. After the purified mana stored inside the beast core is depleted, the beast core will crumble into fine dust.

Curious as well, I put it into my pocket to study later. After I got back, I've been training my father and Elijah whenever I can while I train by myself at night. Until now, my father has been busy absorbing the beast core but looking at his aura now, I could see a noticeable change.

Noticing my inquisitive look, he shoots me a smirk and tosses me his dirty towel. "Your father has now passed the dark orange stage into the solid orange stage."

I laugh as my father starts flexing his muscles in demonstration of his accomplishments.

"Congrats Dad. Now that you're at solid orange stage, I think it'll be okay to teach you something I've been messing around with." I hang the towel on a nearby chair.

Giving me a curious look, he beckons for me to continue.

Focusing a tiny bit of mana into the palm of my right hand, I will a small flame to ignite. "Here is the most basic flame attribute technique you learn, Ember." I throw the small flame from my palm unto the towel that was hanging off the nearby metal chair.

As expected, the small flame, by the time it reached the towel, was so diluted that all it left was a tiny black soot mark in the middle of the white towel.

"If you're talking about mana theory, it's not anything new to me, Son. For Augmenters, since we produce mana from within our bodies, the farther the mana travels away from us, the more diluted and weaker it becomes."

"I wasn't trying to demonstrate mana theory. That'll be for next time Dad." I wag my finger at him, earning me a hard thump on my head for being a smartass.

Rubbing my head, I will another small portion of mana into the palm of my hand. I ignite another flame but whereas the first time the color of the flame was bright red; this time it was orange. "Now watch Dad." I throw the small flame, that was the same size as the previous flame, at the towel again but this time, it burned a small hole through the towel.

My father didn't show much of a reaction. "Didn't you just add more mana unto the flame to make it stronger?"

Shaking my head, I explain. "If I added more mana, the flame would be bigger. Dad, did you notice the color of the flame?"

"Yeah, the color was a bit lighter, more orange." He scratches his head, trying to piece this puzzle together.

"That's the key! What I did just now was a technique that is considered a high level spell by Conjurers to use only." I grew excited as I began explaining it to him.

"You see Dad, fire's temperature, or more accurately, the rate of combustion depends on a mix of different things: the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere, black-body radiation, the type of fuel being burned, the oxidation of the fuel and so on. The so-called 'fuel' being burned, in this case is fire attribute mana. What I discovered while playing around with it is how versatile this 'fuel' can be. That orange flame, Dad, was a flame much hotter than the previous one, making it even stronger." I stop to take a breath.

My father gives me an expression as if I talked to him in Hebrew but he understood the last portion of my explanation. "So what you're saying is that, by using the same amount of mana, I can produce an even hotter flame for my techniques?" He fiddles with his beard while pondering.

"Exactly! Watch, it can go even further." I demonstrate again, this time producing a yellow flame, which left an even bigger hole in the towel, with the ridges still aflame.

I don't stop there. The last demonstration takes a bit more time, as I have to manipulate very carefully the fire attribute mana in my palm. After a couple of minutes, I produce a dim blue flame, which makes my father's eye go wide. Upon throwing the blue flame at the towel, the towel instantly combusts and the fire spreads rapidly, eating away at the towel until only ashes are left.

"Are you sure you're my son?" My father gives me a suspicious eye before smiling. Smiling back, I say, "I must've gotten Mom's brain right?"

Elijah walks in, his head a bird's nest and glasses crooked, looking at me clinched in a headlock by my father who was squeezing hard at my nose while I tapped in resignation.

"What are you guys doing..." is all he says while he rubs his eyes.

""Training."" We say at the same time. My voice nasally from having my nose squeezed.

I give my father a few key pointers in controlling the structure of his flame attribute

mana so he could produce higher-level flames. "Son, why did I have to become a solid orange stage in order to learn this though?" He says while seated in a mediation position. Changing the structure of the attribute mana is basically the essence of chanting a spell. Using vocal incantations can condition the brain to change the structure of the mana in the atmosphere to create a spell.

"The higher your mana core stage, not only do you have a larger pool of mana to draw out from, the mana itself becomes of higher quality so you can have more control over the miniscule properties of it." I clarify, turning my focus unto Elijah.

Nodding in understanding, my father goes back to training, holding his right palm up and willing mana into it.

Elijah's training was a bit slower. What I realized with Elijah is that his control over his main element, Earth, is unstable, metal even more. It's not so much as a problem with mana manipulation of the earth attribute mana but more so the quantity. Elijah's lack of control over the strength of his power made it so he couldn't make precise and coordinated spells.

One thing that continues to baffle me about Elijah's magic is how unfair it is. Earth is powerful, yet limited in the sense that Conjurers and Augmenters alike can only make do with the earth that is around them. Most of the time, that isn't a problem, but it still gives a certain amount of predictability in the attacks that earth mages use.

Elijah, on the other hand, seems to have the ability to change the structure of molecules and change it into earth. The closest thing I could think of that may explain it is something akin to alchemy. Elijah, as an example, can summon earth spikes from trees and buildings made of wood. A limitation is that he isn't able to conjure earth spells from water or thin air, but his capability to so easily change the structure of earth and its properties scare me.

When I think about the possibilities his power has, I think of the spell petrification. When normal Earth Conjurers use the petrification spell, it is actually just using the surrounding earth to form around a human, "petrifying" him. Elijah, on the other hand, if he became adept enough, could literally change a human into stone.

I shake my head to dismiss those scary thoughts. I'm just glad that Elijah is a friend, not a foe. Elijah's practice consists of playing around with a small ball of earth. He is practicing doing different things with the small ball of earth: Rotating it really fast,

changing the shape of it, expanding it, condensing it, splitting it into different pieces, etc. This way, he can train both his mana control and shortening his incantations by learning the so-called "theory" of how the spells work.

I go back into my room, leaving Elijah and my father to train. Looking at my bed, I see Sylvie still sleeping. The transformation still seems to have a small toll on her body. She either takes longer sleeps at times, or a separate nap. Fortunately, these periods of sleep have been getting shorter so I'm hopeful that in a few weeks, she'll return to normal.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I take a look at the S-class beast core, probing it with a string of mana. The mana inside has been depleted so I was curious as to why it didn't dissolve but upon probing a bit deeper, I feel a sharp pain on my left arm that makes me drop the beast core.

"What the hell?" I rub the tattoo that I always covered underneath the feather of Sylvia. Carefully picking up the beast core again, I probe it once more, even more intrigued than before. Suddenly, inside the vast black space of the beast core that I was studying, the figure of the Elderwood Guardian that I almost lost my life to appears, bowing at me with its lance pointed directly upward.

"A beast will!" I tremble in excitement as I clutch harder at the invaluable prize I obtained from the dungeon. What would happen if I were to integrate with two beasts? Was that possible? Would I then have two? Or would this one replace my Dragon's Will?

While I was thinking of these things, a sudden feeling interrupts me. It wasn't as intimate as the mental transmissions I have with Sylvie but a primitive form of communication. Realizing that it's from the will of the Elderwood Guardian, I will more mana into the beast core, hoping it'll somehow allow me to have a better connection with it.

"I see..." I can't help but feel a bit disappointed as I let go of the beast core. From what the Elderwood Guardian was trying to express, if I were to try and absorb this beast's will, only the stronger of the two will end up being left. It made sense, but what I didn't understand was, why wasn't my father able to absorb the beast's will?

I realized the answer almost immediately after remembering what Grandpa Virion, that crazy old elf, taught me a few years back. There was the matter of compatibility

between the beast's element and the mage's element attribute.

I can't help but let out a small smile knowing who to give this to.

'Good morning Papa! Why are you smiling?' Sylvie cuddles up on my lap and purrs when I pet her.

"I'm just thinking of how fun school is going to be." I answer.

"BROTHER WAKE... oh!" My sister slams the door open but sees awake me petting Sylvie.

I walk up and also pat my sister's small head. "Let's go eat!"

Chapter 38 Introspection

"Whew." Wiping the sweat off my body with a towel I hung nearby, I put my robe back on. I was in the backyard patio with only the full moon illuminating the area. Sylvie was curled up beside me, her now white fur heaving up and down, matching the pace of her breathing.

With everyone else sleeping, I had the peace of training to my heart's content. These past few weeks, I've been doing little outside of training myself as well as helping the growth of Elijah and my father, with a little bit of pointers for my baby sister as well.

Ellie hasn't been training much but her progress is still pretty decent. I predict that she'll awaken around 11 if she keeps at her pace, maybe even 10 if she actually starts trying more. I find it oddly satisfying when I watch my sister play with her friends she made at the School for Ladies she attends.

This was basically just a small class of noble young girls gathered together to be taught etiquette and basic household skills. While I've known this before, the general population believes that "proper" and "refined" ladies should have both the manners and grace of a queen, while still able to cook and sew for her husband.

In the world I lived before, women worked just as much as men, and the whole "women should stay at home" saying became a taboo, often incurring the wrath of many females if said aloud.

Ellie was asleep now after creating a fuss, saying she wouldn't go to bed if I didn't stay with her until she fell asleep. This makes me chuckle when I compare that spoiled behavior to the refined, graceful façade she put on in front of her friends, acting all lady-like or what not. I almost burst out laughing when she addressed me as "dear honorable brother" in front of the couple girls her age she was having a tea party with.

My sister's birthday was coming up soon and I could tell she was eager as to what present I would give her. Knowing her, she would probably love whatever I gave her as long as I gave it some thought, but with my personality, I wanted to give her something functional as well. The problem was, I was out of money. This blasted

dimension ring cost me all the gold I earned as an Adventurer.

I thought a little bit about what I could do to earn money when something came to mind. One obvious advantage I had was my mind filled with ideas and inventions that haven't been developed in this world yet.

With a satisfied grin on my face, I turn back to training. There were two things I was focusing on outside of developing my mana core, which I estimate will reach dark yellow stage by the time school starts in autumn. One was training heavily on my Lightning and Ice attribute skills, which are by far my strongest assets.

I've decided that I will keep my fire or water, alongside lightning and ice, skills a secret during my stay at Xyrus Academy. I think being an adept dual-elemental Augmenter is the most attention I would want during my years there. Since Lucas has only seen me use fire elemental skills during the dungeon excursion and the testing ground, it'll be even harder for him to fit the pieces together if I only use earth and wind magic. If I purposely don't train my earth and wind magic at all until I enter the Academy, I think it'll be more than enough to pass off as just a 'talented genius' that won't raise too many eyebrows.

I opened one of the books I brought with me from the library. I managed to find some of the limited books on deviation skills, containing a few segments on lightning and ice. It seems that, for lightning, there are two main methods that Augmenters opt towards. One was internal, and other was external. Because of the unique properties of lightning compared to other elements and their deviants, there are some individuals who focus on using internal lightning skills, which is stated as much more difficult.

Thunderclap Impulse is one of the internal lightning techniques that I developed, which could have said as the stepping stone into much more powerful skills. The book only goes to say that, for internal lightning users, most reach a ceiling quite early on and switch to external techniques to learn. This means that internal lightning skills haven't been developed enough for people to actually find advantages in.

This is also the route that I chose to go to. While I will have some external lightning skills under my belt, I know from experience just how much more powerful internal skills are compared to the external counterparts. Of course, it may not be as flashy but what I want isn't a dazzling light show, but absolute power. It'll take time and patience to develop but I already know the rewards will be tremendous as I imagine a level

above just using a small current of lightning to quicken my reaction.

As for my Ice elemental skills, I want to focus on wide range skills, focusing on fighting against multiple opponents. The combination skill of White Fire and Absolute Zero is my strongest skill, which I can only use under the massive power up I get from the second phase of my Dragon's Will, Integrate. I imagine that, for now even if I have the technique and theory down for either lightning or ice skills, I'll need to be in the Integrate phase if I want to use the more powerful skills.

I can't help grow a little impatient at this fact but there isn't much I can do now except train. I have so many advantages but I'm still not satisfied at the level of power I was at. I can say with confidence that, if I were to fight against the former me from my old world, I would win. The amount of mana in this world and the fact that I have Dragon's Will alongside of mana rotation, I can just overpower my previous self. However, the world I'm in is filled with dangers much greater than the dangers in my old world, so growing complacent would end up being detrimental.

I pick up the other book that I brought, which is on beast wills. I've already read it once so I skip to the part on training it, which makes me sigh in helplessness. I saw this coming, but I couldn't help but grow disheartened when I read it the first time. It seems that the best way to train the beast will acquired is being taught by the beast itself. The only other alternative mentioned was to study thoroughly about the beast itself so the beast tamer can learn and practice the traits of the beast.

Option one was obviously out of the question, seeing as Sylvia either died or is in hostage by whatever being that black horned figure was. Option two had its limit as well. The fact that I could even use one of the 'acquire' skills and even go into Integrate phase was because of the perks in being a Legacy Tamer, where a certain amount of insight came alongside the Will. Even for a dragon, she seemed so unique; I couldn't even imagine what sort of powers she had. I wish she had left me some clues as to what some of her powers were before everything happened.

Slap

"Snap out of it!" I say aloud while smacking both of my cheeks. Bringing myself down on what I don't have isn't going to solve anything.

Besides training my lightning and ice attribute magic, the other skill I'm focusing on will be magic cancellation.

The theory is that elemental attribute mana is manipulated, whether it is through the form of a spell or through extensive knowledge of the skill, into the projected destination or into the caster's own body. Speaking very technically, these mana particles are basically coded to affect either the atmosphere or the specific target to produce a certain outcome. There is a very small delay from when the mage casts the coded mana particles and when those particles have effect and form the spell.

During that delay, if I was able to potentially disrupt those mana particles with mana of my own that can cancel the said spell, I would be able to discretely terminate the spell without it even forming.

While in theory that sounds amazing, there are several problems. One, in order for this to even work, I will have to know what spell the opponent is using. That isn't a problem when the Conjurer or even the Augmenter chants the spell, but in cases of wordless chanting, or even instacasting, I would have to know what the spell is by the makeup of the mana during the almost split second that the manipulated mana particles are cast before it takes effect and forms into a spell.

This requires learning a tremendous amount of spells and figuring out which skills can effectively cancel them out. Just thinking about that leaves me with a headache. Most can be figured out with magic theory but being able to almost instantly thinking of the correct spell to counteract the opponent's means I need to know it by heart. However, I know that mastering this skill will be a priceless asset; especially more since only someone like me, who is able to manipulate all four elements, can do this.

On this subject, I start thinking of when I entered the Integrate phase. My vision turned black and white and I was clearly able to see the fluctuation in mana all around me, which, when using something like canceling magic, it would be very useful.

I pick up my books and towel with one hand and pick up Sylvie with the other and head back up to my room. Vincent offered another room for Elijah but my parents wouldn't allow it since he was a Leywin guest, which meant he should just be in one of our rooms. As a compromise I asked them to just bring in another bed for Elijah, since the room was more than spacious enough.

Returning back to my room, Elijah was already fast asleep, sleeping straight on his back with his arms folded on his chest, making it seem like he's lying in a coffin.

Even when he sleeps, he looks like such a straight and proper fellow. Elijah was a good

friend and it helped that our personalities complimented each other. Elijah was pretty peculiar. Despite his straight-laced, stern appearance (mainly due to the hair and glasses), he was a very emotional lad. He's logical in a way where he has set principles that he never strays away from, making him very honest and trustworthy, but when it comes to people and relationships, he often thinks with his 'heart' leaving him quite vulnerable if people choose to take advantage of him.

I can only imagine when he hits puberty, if he already hasn't started, and starts thinking with his penis instead of his head when it comes to the opposite sex.

As for me, whether it was because I lived and remember my previous life, I can only see myself analytical and somewhat scheming. I have to admit that I have a hard time trusting people completely and always trying to think a couple steps ahead. I somewhat regret the lack of innocence I have compared to normal 11-year-olds, but one thing that I have grown to realize is that, when it comes to the few close relationships that I do have, I become very invested in them, almost to the point of fault. Did it have something to do with being an orphan in my previous life? Because the only close person I had was the caretaker that picked me up and was later killed?

Even as a King previously, I can't say with confidence that I was the most mature, and in many aspects, I would even say I'm not very King-like, but one thing that I can't change is the amount of importance I have to those I hold dearly.

After taking a quick shower, I sink into bed, causing Sylvie to stir in her sleep. She cuddles by me and starts breathing steadily again. The slow rhythm of her breathing lulls me to sleep.

Chapter 39 New Winds

"Brother wake up!!!!"

"OOF" The wind suddenly gets knocked out of me as my sister jumps on top of my stomach.

Rubbing my sore sternum, I gasp out, "Ellie, you're not a little kid anymore, you're going to seriously hurt me one day."

"Are you calling me fat Big Brother?" Ellie pretends to gasp. This little rascal, she's only learning useless things at that school for proper ladies or what not.

I turn to see Elijah already showered and clothed, his glasses still a bit foggy. "I swear you sleep like a log Art. Your wife is going to seriously have to use spells to wake you up when you get older." He shakes his head.

"Shaddup." I slur, too tired to make a witty comeback.

After quickly washing my face and fixing my hair so it's barely presentable, the four of us, with Sylv on top of my head goes downstairs.

'I wonder what's for breakfast. I hope it's meeeaaat.' Sylv ponders, her little fox head swaying side to side in anticipation.

"Good morning you four~ you're just in time." My mother calls out to us from the kitchen as the maids were preparing the table. Even though there were cooks in the manor, my mother always wants to at least prepare breakfast for us, so while Tabitha was helping her, the maids help set the table and cleans up afterwards. After I came back, my family, as well as Vincent and Tabitha, both noticed the apparent change in appearance of Sylvie. I just played it off as her transformation after digesting a lot of beast cores. But from that, my parents and the Helsteas knew Sylvie wasn't just your average mana beast, even making small conversations with her, as if she was an intelligent house pet.

"Good morning boys, and of course my little princess, did you guys sleep well?" My father, who was talking to Vincent, turns to us and gives my struggling sister bearded kiss on her cheek.

"Ew Dad, that tickles!" She pushes him away, wiping the spot she was kissed.

"Did you guys sleep well kids?" Vincent gives us a broad smile as he starts teasing my father about his doting habits towards Ellie.

"Good morning Aunt Leywin, Aunt Tabitha, Uncle Vincent and Uncle Reynolds." Elijah announces before he sits down next to me. He stopped calling my parents Sir and Lady as he got closer to them, eventually calling everyone either Aunt or Uncle.

After saying good morning to everyone, I got back to my seat and started eating a ham and vegetable omelet with a very crisp soup.

While eating, my father suddenly speaks up with a mouth full of omelet. "That reminds me. Kids, if you don't have any plans, do you want to go with us to City Square? There's a big announcement in the Capital City of Etistin where the King and Queen reside but a couple of artificers are going to put up a live projection of the broadcast in City Square."

"Honey, please don't talk with your mouth full." My mother gently scolds before indulging in gossip with Tabitha about the latest news of the city Ladies. It seems she's getting along quite well with the noble ladies of Xyrus, seeing as the both of them often go out on brunch meetings and afternoon shopping trips.

"Sounds good Dad, Elijah and I don't have anything planned today anyways, right?" I turn to my friend who's wolfing down his second omelet. He shoots us a thumbs up and I turn to Vincent.

"I wanna go too! Can I Mom?" Ellie leans forward on the table towards my mother.

"You have school today Ellie. You can hang out with your brother after." She nudges Ellie back down unto her chair as my sister pouts.

"Uncle Vincent. I remember you mentioned something about how you were going to visit a famous researcher that has a lab in Xyrus. Do you mind introducing me to him after we watch the announcement today?" I ask while I place a portion of omelet unto my fork with my knife.

"Ah you mean Gideon? Has he caught your interest? He's not just a researcher but a well-known inventor and artificer as well! He's the one responsible for designing the ships we use for the rivers as well as other well-used artifacts! I do have some business with him anyway so it wouldn't be a problem taking you. Was there something specific you needed from him?" He quizzes, the intelligent eyes behind his glasses shining with curiosity.

"Not something I needed, but more of something to discuss. I thought he would find it valuable." I give a vague answer, catching his interest all the more.

"Well, he's not the type to meet new people but I'm sure I can get him to come out of his hole if I'm with you." He nods to himself.

"Great! I look forward to meeting him!" I focus back on my omelet, which Sylvie took a big bite out of, while Elijah and my father curiously wonder what I'm up to now.

The City Square, which was usually bustling with a lot of activity, was abnormally packed with both normal civilians and nobles alike. On the side of the big clock tower, there were four orbs creating a square while underneath these floating orbs, there were two artificers with their brown robes, signifying that they do not do their work for glory and fame, chanting and fiddling with a device. Sylvie, who was looking around eagerly at the huge crowd of people, was fidgeting on top of my head. Elijah, my father and Vincent were the only ones who came, with my mother and Tabitha hanging out with their friends and Ellie at school.

BZZZ

"The three Kings and Queens of the different countries in our beloved Continent of Dicathen have gathered here on this memorable day!"

I see a very fancily dressed man announce to an audience that looked to be in the hundreds of thousands. Looks like many travelled all the way over there.

"Attention Humans, Elves and Dwarves alike, I go by Blaine Glayder. While all of you know me as the King of Sapin, today I speak, not as the King of Humans, but only one of the representative of the Continent of Dicathen!"

The hundreds of thousands of people all kneel, some going on all fours in worship at

the sight of the King. The blurry projection becomes clearer and zooms in on the balcony of the Castle. There I see The King of Sapin in the front, while the Queen of Sapin, Priscilla Glayder, was seated behind him alongside a few other important looking figures. My eyes widen as I recognize Alduin and Merial Eralith, the King and Queen of Elenoir with Grandpa Virion standing behind them with his arms crossed. Besides them are two representatives of the Dwarves, which I assume to be the King and Queen.

"Today marks the beginning of a new era in this Continent we call our home. I assume many of you know of the existing problems between the Humans and the Elves while even the Dwarves were considered just business partners. However, that is not the way we wish to continue. The representatives of all three kingdoms, YOUR leaders, have met together many times over the past few years in effort to unite our races. Two years ago, we have agreed for ALL races to be able to become adventurers. It started out with just one or two representatives, but now it has expanded. It brings me a smile when I see parties with humans, elves, and dwarves alike, working together towards a common goal. Last year marks another big landmark where Xyrus Academy welcomed students from the Kingdom of Elenoir and the Kingdom of Darv so that the new generation of the best mages can make friends and memories with not just humans, but all three races. We all understand how difficult it may be for some of us to adjust after constant enmity between the races, we urge you to let go of the past and the discriminations you may hold and think beyond that, if not for yourself, but for your children and the future of this Continent."

There was another big round of applause with a roar of worship and adoration accompanying it. King Glayder sat down and Alduin Eralith, the King of Elenoir and Tessia's father, got up from his seat and cleared his throat before speaking into this world's version of what seemed to be a microphone.

"It is an honor to speak on behalf of everyone here on this unforgettable day. As King Glayder so adamantly spoke about, I am also in agreement about the future of this Continent. For some people, this may not hold much interest but for many who yearn for Adventure and new places to visit, I can wholeheartedly say that this Continent is filled with many unknowns. An obvious example is the very the Beast Glades residing in this Continent. While an uncountable number of Adventurers have ventured out unto the Beast Glades, it is not an exaggeration to say that not even half of it has been traversed. While the mana beasts have not left the Beast Glades, who is to insure that, just because they haven't yet, they

never will? Even in our own homeland of Dicathen, there are places so dangerous, no one dares to explore, but what if I were to say that even greater mysteries and dangers are out there?"

King Eralith gives a brief pause while the crowd in Etistin and the crowd here in the City Square of Xyrus fill with sound of murmurs.

"That's right! You have not heard wrong fellow citizens of Dicathen. We are announcing today, February 10th of the 1005th Cycle, that we have found evidence of another Continent."

The crowds break out into a clamor of noises, some angry, some afraid, everyone curious. Even my own hands shake in excitement as my father and Vincent look at each other in shock.

"Please. We ourselves don't know very much so your guess is as good as ours. What we do know, is that out there, possibly within reach in a couple of years, is another continent that may or may not be hostile. There have been evidence of them trying to reach us as well, but on both sides, it seems that our current technology does not permit us to travel that far."

The crowd shown in the Capital is in chaos until the Dwarven King rises from his chair and walks towards the microphone.

"QUIETTTTT!!!"

Silence

"As Alduin said, we don't know much. However, in these times of uncertainty and possible threats in the future, wouldn't you guys all agree that standing beside one another is what's best for this Continent and our people? YOUR children can be in danger as well. The last thing we want is to fight amongst ourselves. Our appearances may be different and our cultures may clash, but remember this... we are all born in this continent of Dicathen. I for one am proud of that and hope that future generations will feel the same way. What about you?"

The crowd is silent at first but a couple of claps trigger more claps and suddenly a huge boom of applause and cheer breaks out. The Dwarf King wasn't as eloquent in his words as the two previous kings that spoke, but his words had a very strong impact. Even Elijah next to me was clapping excitedly as Sylvie continued to watch the

screen in curiosity.

"The process of joining our three races and Kingdoms will take time and much effort, but today, we will be anointing 6 individuals, individuals that we, the three Kings and Queens, believe to be the most courageous, tactful, smart and powerful."

From the back of the podium, 6 individuals come out, two elves, two humans and two dwarves. Clad in a refined white armor that varied slightly for each person, they walked up and knelt down on one knee.

The three Kings each made their way in front of the 6 kneeling knights and took out from a small ornamental box, 6 rings. King Glayder of the Humans presented the rings to the two elf knights while the Dwarf King presented it to the two human knights. Finally, King Alduin of the Elves placed the rings on the two Dwarf knights, stating that they stand and bow to the crowd. As the cheers exploded, King Glayder went up and spoke once more.

"These 6 individuals will henceforth be granted the title of the Six Lances. Each Lance signifies the ties they hold to not their Kingdom, but to the entire Continent. This is a truly historical moment as the first Lances have been anointed. These 6 individual's main goal will be towards the well-being of the Continent, whether that be exploring dangerous and unknown dungeons in the Beast Glades, as well as working alongside us, the rulers of this Continent to ensure that our home is protected when the time comes that we are met with foreign hostilities from the different Continent."

Once more, the crowd roars as many throw flowers and the clothes that they're wearing up in the air.

"Lastly, while the title of being one of the Six Lances may be a prestigious one that is comparable to even ourselves as Kings, this title also brings upon great burden and danger. Children of the new generation that seek to become the future protectors of this Continent, strive to be one of the Six Lances! Grow strong and noble as not even the heavens are the limit!"

With that, the four orbs making up the corners of the projection float down as the image of the announcement fade, the last thing we hear were the chants of "Long live the King, long live Dicathen". The City Square was filled with excitement as everyone

started discussing about different things.

Beside me, I hear Elijah muttering to himself, "Wow... the Six Lances... That sounds awesome." The children within the crowd already started play acting the scene of the anointment, shouting with their friends that they too have become one of the Six Lances and are going to go out and fight evil.

A part of me wants to be excited as well. Hell, I was excited! The prospect of a new continent to explore with different people and maybe even different races intrigued me to no end. However, I was quite cynical of this whole thing. Sure, the points they make are quite true, but in the end, they're just making this new Continent the common enemy so that all of the races of Dicathen can unite. It was old tool used by many Kings but an effective one that works.

Still... my heart as, not just a King, but a warrior and mage thirsting for adventure and excitement, thumped harder and harder.

Chapter 40 I'm Not That Nice

As we were plowing our way through the crowds in City Square, I heard various chats on the Lances. These Six Lances were more than just a group of overpowered Mages; they would soon become the very symbol of this Continent. Being composed of two of each race, it is impartial towards the Humans, Elves, and Dwarves. I wouldn't be surprised if this caused a big outbreak in talented Mages. While not all children who awaken become mages, whether it may be due to financial situations or issues of talent, the fact that everyone is eligible to become a Lance will definitely stir up a new era of Mages.

I could tell the Kings purposely put a bad light on the New Continent so that this new potential common enemy would become the reason for the three races to unite. Looking at it logically, there could be great advantages such as trading raw material, knowledge on magic and artifacts and different technology, but this would just create a potential competition between the Humans, Elves and Dwarves, each of them trying to get to the New Continent first to claim the new resources. In that sense, I do agree with this intentional propaganda of sorts.

Getting into the carriage waiting for us at the edge of City Square, my father asks the driver to first take him to the Helstea Auction house.

"I have a couple of things to take care of so I'll meet you guys back home later tonight. Don't cause too much trouble, Son." My father ruffles my hair while shooting me a sarcastic grin.

"Please take us to Gideon's facility." Vincent directs the driver to our next destination. About thirty minutes into the drive, the scenery changes from tall buildings into small houses with signboards reading "Artifacts" on a lot of them.

Noticing the curious gaze I had outside, Vincent chimes in, "We're at the part of the city where all of the Artificers gather. You'll see a lot of neat gadgets here as well as useful tools for Conjurers."

Apparently, this sparked Elijah's interest because he asked the driver to stop at the

nearest artifact shop. "I'm going to look around for a bit and see if I can find anything worth buying." He says before stepping out.

'Sylv, go with Elijah while I visit Gideon with Uncle Vincent' I tell Sylvie who was on my lap. She gave me a curious look but didn't complain, hopping out of the carriage after Elijah. I didn't want a genius researcher like Gideon eyeing Sylvie so it would be better to just keep her away.

"Do you have any money?!" I shout towards him from inside the carriage as we leave him, realizing that normal 12-year-old boys shouldn't have that much money.

"I have my dungeon money saved up. Remember? I'm not like you!" I can barely make out a wink as he was obviously teasing me about my lack of gold.

"Tch. How immature." I grumble under my breath, causing Vincent to let out a small chuckle.

About an hour later, after we passed through the densest part of the city, we arrived at a fairly large building. This building was only 1 story but was quite big in width, which was rare to see in a clustered city like Xyrus.

"We're here!" The driver announces as he opens the door for us.

Hopping out of the carriage behind Vincent, we make our way to the front door. After knocking on the metal door, an old man with a handlebar mustache, dressed as a butler, opens the door.

"Greetings. Master Gideon is not... Ah hello Master Vincent, please come in." He says while opening the door. He realizes that we are welcomed guests, giving us a deep bow before showing us inside.

The butler seems to automatically deny everyone but a certain few people. The inside of the facility was hardly appealing. The whole place was a mess, with tools on the ground and rather intriguing looking raw materials stacked high on shelves. There were microscopes and other tools that looked vaguely familiar to the ones in my old world.

"Himes! I told you not to let anyone... Ah Vincent! I see you've come to bother me again." From the dim corner of a different room, a very short, hunched man makes his way over. Both the butler and the master seem to automatically want to deny visitors

at heart.

Taking a closer look at the supposed genius inventor/researcher/artificer, I can say for certain that he looks the part. His curly hair that looks like it's been struck by lightning more than once complimented the beady eyes that had dark bags under them. His complexion was pale while he had a pair of goggles hanging on his neck.

"Haha! As welcoming as ever, aren't you Gideon?" Vincent shakes his head, giving his acquaintance a helpless smile and handshake.

"Bah! Don't even start! This past year, the Royal Family sent in over a dozen messengers asking for a way to start traversing the ocean to reach the New Continent! I haven't had a decent sleep in months!" The hunched eccentric flails his arms in disgust as he starts pacing around.

"Is it really true that they really found evidence of another Continent Gideon?" Vincent couldn't help but relieve his curiosity. Even I was interested in this.

"Hoho! That, my friend, is actually a truth those snobby royal families are telling for once. I was the one to study the evidence! All I'll say is that, the New Continent has even better artificers and perhaps even Mages than ours." His beady eyes disappear as his smile widens, revealing yellow teeth with remnants of whatever he ate for his last meal.

"What makes you say that?" Vincent pushes, leaning closer to Gideon.

"The Royal Family took back the evidence for safe keeping, but that 'evidence' was an artifact. Even I couldn't figure out everything it does, but this artifact was attached to a bird-like mana beast that has never been seen on Dicathen before. This bird-like mana beast had the ability to camouflage almost completely with its surroundings. The only way we were able to catch it was because an Adventurer accidentally shot it down while he was actually aiming for a nearby squirrel he was hunting to eat. Not only that, one of the functions I was able to figure out from the artifact that was attached to the bird was that it was able to record and store moving images. The artifact was the size of my palm and it could do what four big magic projection crystals could and more! Tell me, why would someone from our Continent need to record videos?" He leans towards Vincent too so that the two of them were only a hand width apart.

"Fascinating!" Vincent sighs as he rubs his chin.

"So... who's the little kid you brought? Your mistress's son?" Gideon waggles his eyebrows lewdly at Vincent.

"Oh God... Don't even make jokes like that. Tabitha would kill me... quite literally I'm afraid. No... this is Arthur Leywin, I consider him a nephew of mine." He places his hand on my shoulder.

Giving a respectable bow, I introduce myself. "Hello Mr. Gideon. Uncle Vincent has told me many great things about you and your work."

"Hoh~ quite the etiquettes for a kid. How old are you?" He asks, studying me with his beady eyes.

"I will be turning 12 in May." I answer simply.

"I see... So, why did you bring him here, Vincent? I don't take on students or disciples you know." He nods to himself condescendingly.

"Actually, I would like to know for myself why he wanted to come." Vincent turns to me.

"Mr. Gideon, the fact that you have messengers from the Royal Family visiting you, I can assume that your work is quite influential correct?" I put on the air of a respecting young lad.

"Of course! They're a pain but I receive quite a lot of money from them!" His chin sticks out and I can almost see his nose getting longer from his pride.

"Perfect." Without saying anything more, I pick up a big piece of paper lying on the ground and sketch out a blueprint. It took a while for me to think of an idea to sell without it changing the world too much. This world relies heavily on magic for a lot of the bigger tools and machines. That was primarily one of the reasons they couldn't build a ship capable of travelling long distances. Mages didn't have an infinite source of mana and trying to carry along enough mages to power up a big ship was impossible.

Both Vincent and Gideon were baffled by my sudden actions and were muttering to each other what I was exactly doing. I didn't let them see what I was drawing so they

were getting more and more impatient with my behavior.

After about 15 minutes, I finished drawing a rough draft of a steam engine. I didn't draw in some of the key components so that Gideon can't just steal my idea; I would draw those in AFTER the negotiations were complete.

"T-This is... this..." His beady eyes widen two-fold and he snatched the paper away so he could study it in depth.

"Of course... why didn't I think of this? There was this solution as well!" I could see his hands trembling as he had a hard time digesting the blueprint.

Suddenly, his eyebrows furrowed and his gaze darted all around the paper. "I feel like something is missing..."

I gently take the paper back and roll it up. "I did leave out some key details that I will more than happily include once our negotiations are over." I put on an innocent smile.

"Are you really just a twelve-year-old?" His gaze becomes sharp but soon looks helpless, as he himself knows that what I have to offer him is too good to let go. Even Vincent looks baffled by the turn of events but he handled it a little bit better since he knows I'm kind of always like this.

"Yup! Can you show me some of your best artifacts? Uncle Vincent tells me you make some of the best!" I throw in a nice compliment to sugar him up.

"Himes! Bring my latest works!" Gideon shouts. Soon after, the butler with the handlebar mustache brings with him a protected case that was the size of an adult, sealed with something even I don't recognize.

Gideon whispers something into the lock while placing both his hands on it. After a brief moment, the lock glows and folds itself and changes shape, opening itself. Inside the case were various enchanted weapons. Gideon goes over each of the weapons and what they were capable of. I know that each of these weapons were invaluable and not comparable to the ones sold in shops and forges, but they didn't fit the bill. I looked at some of the wands to maybe get for Elijah but none of them suited him.

Shaking my head, I heard the mad scientist grumble something foul.

Gideon eventually led us into a hidden storage where there were precious gems and

raw material that even made me shocked. "This is an ironite diamond, one of the most valuable gems found on this continent. It has properties capable of storing a lot mana to use in case of emergency." By this time, Gideon looks defeated when my face still looked a bit unsatisfied.

"Sigh... Himes, can you bring me the pendants?" He rubs his temples.

"But Master, this was made so that..." "I know! Just bring it!" Gideon interrupts the baffled Himes.

Eventually, Himes comes back holding a small case with an even more complicated lock on it.

"These are some of the products I made for the Royal Family. They've been asking for life-protecting artifacts in case of any danger." He just shrugs his shoulder; any sense of confidence he once had has vanished.

Picking up one of the two identical pendants that was a very soft, yet radiant pink color carefully ornamented and decorated in a white gold thin chain.

"I had some of the best designers work on the actual piece itself so it is err... 'suitable' for the Royal Family." He clarifies

I will a bit of mana into the pendant and when I do, I vaguely see the outline of mana beast I've once read about. "This is made from a Phoenix Wyrm..." I mutter.

"You were able to figure that out?" Gideon's eyes turn even more intrigued as he studies me, trying to figure out exactly what more I was capable of.

Continuing on, Gideon explains. "While the Phoenix Wyrm isn't nearly as rare as the dragon species, this particular breed is still a high S class mana beast. They aren't really known for their power and combat capabilities but their unique ability to preserve their own life. When the Phoenix Wyrm is getting assaulted, its pink scales will elongate and harden around them, forming a sort of cocoon."

This catches my interest.

"However, that isn't even the best part. When the super hard cocoon they're protected in breaks, they deplete all of the mana in their beast core to instantly transport themselves to wherever they know they're safe. It's a very unique ability that I've only

seen in the Phoenix Wyrm. These two pendants are probably the most valuable artifacts I have. The jewel itself is made from the beast core of the Phoenix Wyrm and also small fragments of its scales, allowing it to reproduce the life-preserving effects of the beast, to a certain degree." He sighs, after finishing his explanation.

"How many times will the user be able to utilize the effects?" I simply ask, studying the pendant even closer.

"Honestly... I'm not too sure. The Royal Family presented to me 5 of these beast cores that have been kept over time throughout generations. However, they didn't know what exactly these mana cores did; they only know that they were extremely valuable. They have already been studied and none had the beast will, but still, the value of just one of these beast cores cost more than normal S-class cores. The first of the five I made were a failure, not showing the ability at all. The second and third showed its ability once before turning to dust. I imagine since the mana core doesn't completely deplete itself to transport a human, it'll work at least twice like the previous two cores I used to make the pendant with." He looks at me with hopeful eyes.

"These are for the Royal Family right? Is it really all right for me to take these when the Royal Family provided the raw materials for it?" I quiz.

"Well, like I said, they don't know what exactly those beast cores could do so if I just make a good replacement life-preserving artifact, I think it'll be fine. Of course, if you choose to trade your blueprint with something else, that'll be even better." He smiles in defeat.

"Haha! I'm not that nice Mr. Gideon. I'll take these two pendants." I unroll the blueprint and fill the rest of the key components that I left out.

"Sigh... you're putting me in a tough position but I know that you're doing me a charity by giving me these blueprints. With this, I imagine that our people will be able to reach the New Continent before they reach ours." He studies the blueprint before folding it and carefully putting it in his shelf.

He turns back to me, his gaze not looking at me as if I was a child but more so an equal. "Where did you come up with this idea though? What are you really planning Arthur? Did you want to speed up the process for the voyage to the New Continent?" The genius researcher in him was begging for me to answer his questions.

I only laughed and headed out the door, the silent Vincent, who was still bewildered by the turn of events, following behind me. "Like I said Mr. Gideon, I'm not that nice of a person. I only wanted to get my little sister a good birthday gift." I say without looking back, waving the small case that had the two pendants inside before getting into the carriage.

The journey back home was silent for the first half until Vincent finally spoke. "Not only a genius Augmenter but a brilliant inventor? What exactly was it that you drew out for Gideon?"

I explained in simple terms. "I drew the blueprints for a steam engine, which is capable of producing quite a lot of power by using steam produced from specific material that exists on this Continent. With that and some modifications so that it could be interchanged with fuel powered by mana, traversing a long distance shouldn't be a problem."

"Sigh... From what magical star were you born under?" Vincent shakes his head.

"Haha, please, this was an idea I got from somewhere else and I just tweaked it a little to make it work better. Please don't make too big of a deal out of this to my parents." I smile humbly while looking at the two beautiful pink pendants again.

"Well, your parents probably wouldn't even make a big deal of something like this considering how abnormal you are." He chuckles to himself.

Luckily, no one was home so I carefully hid the case after wrapping the two pendants individually. My sister's birthday was next week and then only a couple of months left until my 12th birthday, and eventually the new year of Xyrus Academy. Even though I wouldn't be that far from my family while I was at school, I would certainly be limited to how often I could visit them, so my main goal during this time was to ensure that my family could take care of themselves in case anything bad happens.

I know I'm probably overthinking everything but I prefer to be on the safe side when it comes to my family. For that, I'm willing to sell even my soul.

Chapter 41 A Ball (1)

The ballroom inside the Helstea Manor was lavishly decorated with colorful string curtains hanging along with other embellishments on the tables and stage. The elaborate placements of the orbs that made up the chandelier sparkled, creating a serene ambience as the guests started coming in through the giant front doors.

I was dressed very formally for the special birthday party Vincent's and our family decided to throw for Ellie. While this world did have formal wear that were very similar to tuxedoes from my old world, this world did not have ties. Instead of ties, handkerchiefs were wrapped underneath the collar and tied fashionably.

Since the ballroom was located in the opposite wing from our rooms, Ellie had no idea that we were throwing her this party. She was under the assumption that the both of our families were going out to a fancy restaurant so she was excitedly getting ready with our mother and Lilia, who came back for the occasion.

Sylv was sleeping inside my room, her body still getting used to the big change she underwent recently, promising her leftover food instead.

"Welcome. Please come in." Putting on a gentlemanly smile, I welcomed my little sister's lady friends she met at school, a duty I was assigned by my mother, one I wasn't too fond of.

Met with shy giggles and red faces, I kept a gentle smile on as more and more people started coming through out of carriages, accompanied by a driver and a chaperone.

The attendees of my sister's party consisted of her female friends, the female friends' chaperone, which were an older group of people, and either my parent's friends or Vincent and Tabitha's friends. By 8 in the evening, most of the people on the list have arrived and my mother notified the maid that she and my sister would be coming down shortly.

"Well aren't you dressed all neat and spiffy?" I turn around back at the door to see Gideon in his signature brown lab coat, a cleaner one at least, and his goggles hanging on his neck.

"This is quite a pleasant surprise Mr. Gideon." My smile must've tipped him off because he grumbles under his breath before replying, "You darn well knew that I would try and see you again didn't you?"

My smile never wavers as I use my hand to guide him towards the refreshment booth. "I'll admit it was unexpected of you to utilize my sister's birthday to meet with me though."

"Bah! You and I have a lot to talk about and don't you forget I'm not leaving you until I'm satisfied!" He, once again, starts grumbling before trotting over to the refreshment booth, asking for an alcoholic drink right off the bat.

Elijah, who I saw talking with a chaperone girl that was a bit older than us comes walking towards me, his shoulder slumped.

"My third time asking a girl and they all so kindly make convenient excuses to go elsewhere... haaa..." He sighs, dejected, his glasses a little crooked.

Before I had the chance to start teasi... comforting him, I was interrupted by a loud voice.

"Everyone please get ready, Lady Alice and Eleanor are both on their way here!" The maid announces before she signals to turn off all of the lights.

"...Mama I thought we were going to go out for dinner? Where are we..."

With the chandelier sparking on and a couple of artifacts popping in an array of colorful lights, my little sister's confused face turns into one of initial surprise, then pure joy. Her eyes widened and cheeks blushed red as her hands instinctively went to cover her gaping mouth.

She didn't have too long to indulge in her moment of astonishment as her school lady friends all ran up to her and gave her hugs, almost carrying her away along with Lilia gave me a meaningful gaze before disappearing.

"Good job welcoming all of the guests Art." My mother came up to me, gently patting

my head before some of her friends pulled her away leaving me to wander. I spotted my father with Vincent and some other importantly dressed figures, talking business and other various uninteresting topics.

Waiters walked around handing out platters and cups of various foods and drinks. I was munching on something akin to a bite-sized sandwich when I hear my father clink his wine glass with his fork.

"Ahem! Before the party officially begins, I would like to thank you on behalf of my precious daughter for coming here tonight!" As my father says, I see my sister blushing in embarrassment as her friends giggle and clap at this joyous occasion.

"Please start the music!" My father signals towards the back of the stage where 5 musicians step out with their instruments. I'm surprised to see that the instruments look identical to the violin family instruments in my world, with two violins, one viola, and one cello musician step out with a pianist behind them. The piano was shaped a little different and as they started playing, the sound it produced was much deeper and richer than a regular grand piano.

"It would bring great joy to see my beloved son and daughter have the first dance!" My father's cheeks were a little flushed from the alcohol because he just said something that could potentially be disastrous. My mother has a look stricken with panic because neither her nor my father has ever given either of us dancing lessons.

I catch my sister's dreadful face as she realizes she could become a total embarrassment on her birthday. Keeping calm, I take confident strides towards where my sister and her friends were.

"Will you honor me with your hand for a dance?" I bow, placing a hand out in front of me. I hear various squeals and "eeks" from her friends but I ignore it.

Ellie, still fretful at the turn of events couldn't find the words so she just starts nodding her head, accepting my hand.

As soon as she is in my hands, a crowd forms around and their applause dies down as the soft flow of music became louder and fills the room. The music was slow and rhythmic, making it easy to follow along. Her once panicked face gradually turns calmer as she realizes she just needs to follow my guide. My right hand holding unto hers and my left gently placed on her fragile waist, we circle around, her light coral

dress fluttering gracefully. Each step she takes mirrors mine as we waltz around the small dance floor formed around us by the crowd. I was calm and poised, dancing and swaying to the song with grace, since dancing has been something I had to learn for any formal occasions as a King. I couldn't embarrass myself as a figurehead for my nation now could I?

My sister's face turned from calm to excitement as she truly started enjoying dancing. Her skin glowed from her smile and perspiration, giving her a radiant feeling to the crowd. Twirling her around as if we had rehearsed for a grand performance, the musicians played along with our dance, them getting inspired as well. As the last verse of the song was coming to an end, she followed my lead well, coming to a beautiful halt synced perfectly with the musicians.

The applause and cheers of the audience, some of the more intoxicated adults even whistling, washed up the soft panting of my sister as the both of us bowed, hand in hand.

"That was wonderful!" "Truly splendid!" "What a great performance!" I hear compliments from all around that make my sister's smile grow even wider.

"Brother!" My sister couldn't hold in her excitement as she jumped into my arms, almost knocking me down in surprise as she starts laughing as her arms were flung around my neck.

"Holy shit! That was great! Where'd you learn to dance like that Art?" Elijah runs up to us, his narrow eyes gleaming in excitement underneath his glasses.

I just give him a shrug before gently placing my sister down. Giving her a pat on the head I say, "Happy Birthday Princess." Giving her a playful wink before my father picks her up.

"HAHA! My beautiful princess and my handsome son! What a great performance!" My father must've been drinking more because he was even redder than before.

"OWOWOW" He lets out as Mother pulls my father down from his high horse by grabbing his earlobe. "Do you understand the disaster this could've caused if Art didn't HAPPEN to know how to dance?" She whispered while still emphasizing the word 'happen'.

"I learned from Jasmine while being an Adventurer. I thought it'd be useful!" I

explained innocently, only getting rid of half the suspicion from my keen mother.

"Don't mind don't mind!" He manages to wheeze out, while my sister, who was put back down, went to her friends. My still angry mother dragged my intoxicated father by the earlobe back to where the adults were.

ELEANOR LEYWIN'S POV:

"Your brother is so handsome! I'm so jealous! I wish my brother was like him; he seems so nice!" My friends I've made at school were all complimenting Brother and me about the dance.

"Hehe! I told you he was great!" I couldn't help but smile in pride at being Brother's only sister.

"Yeah he's awesome! I bet the both of you practiced a lot for that dance! It looked SUPER hard." My best friend Nicole was really excited.

"U-Umm yeah! But our teacher was really good so we got it down really fast!" I lied. I thought it would be weird for them to know that only Brother knew how to dance, not me, when it should be the other way around.

My heart was still beating really fast from the dancing. It was really tiring but also really fun because Brother led me through it so well that I felt like a professional dancer.

"You're grinning really big Ellie." Nicole smirks at me, elbowing me with her arm.

"Hehe! Let's go get some food!" I need to look busy so some of the guys here won't ask me to dance.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

I slumped in a corner, a glass of apple cider in my hand. The dance gave all the more reason for the adults and chaperones to come and greet me, some hinting for a dance. Putting on a smile and speaking in a higher pitch than usual to sound more respecting

can get tiring.

I spot Elijah dancing with a girl that looks around our age maybe a year younger, probably one of the older friends of my sister. I guess he finally managed.

"Hey, you must be the Arthur that everyone's talking about." A blond-haired boy rather tall and poised leans on the wall next to me.

"Haha, I guess I must be." I manage a faint smile while I take another sip of my cider.

"My friends are all jealous of you for stealing the attention from the girls here." He snickers while sticking out his hand. "My name is Jarrod Redner. I heard a lot about you from Lilia at school."

"Ah, you guys both go to Xyrus. As you already know, I'm Arthur Leywin, pleased to make your acquaintance." I receive the handshake before my eyes spot Lilia, who starts coming towards us after she sees us together.

"Can I assume you guys are either dating or that you like her before she gets over here?" I say in a low voice so that only we could hear.

"You're pretty sharp aren't you? Yeah, we're part of the student council together, she being the secretary and me the treasurer. I'm trying to pursue her and I've expressed that many times already." He smiles at Lilia while waving at her.

"She may look a little plain, but she's a good girl, Lilia that is. I hope you treasure her well." I simply say.

"Well I hope to get the chance to do that someday since she's rejected me all three times yet so far." He says, a hint of disappointment escaping his face.

"Hey Arthur! I'm so sorry I couldn't get the chance to say hi to you at all today! I've been so busy as soon as I got here earlier and you were busy with preparing too!" Her face is flushed and by the way she spoke so quickly and excitedly, I was beginning to understand why Jarrod came up to me.

"I'll leave you two alone." Jarrod solemnly walks away, a hint of jealousy in his eyes, not even looking at Lilia as he passes her.

"You look beautiful today." I calmly say, clinking my glass of cider with her glass before

taking another sip.

"O-oh... I mean thank you!" Lilia was really jumpy as she started fiddling with her turtleneck light green dress that was embellished with frills and subtle trimmings. I haven't seen her since before she started attending Xyrus. Lilia matured a lot this past year and a half, her child-like face slowly becoming a bit more refined.

We started talking a bit more about her school life when I started teasing her. "You must be pretty popular at Xyrus. Do you have a boyfriend yet?" Even my sister would sometimes tell me about boys who like her, gloating that she was popular.

"N-no of course not! I don't have anything like that yet haha." Lilia was desperately waving both her hands, signaling no way, which made me laugh.

"You're still young so take your time and meet the right guy. But you better bring him to me first so that I can approve before you start dating him!" I poke her in the arm.

Lilia has a sad look on her face but she quickly covers it up, saying, "Yeah I will! Just don't be too hard of a judge!"

"Ahem, mind if I borrow the young lad?" Gideon, who came up to us, said to Lilia in as gentle of a manner he could manage.

Chapter 42 A Ball (2)

Lilia is caught a bit by surprise but still replies in good manner.

"O-of course! I'll see you later then Art!" She waves at me, bowing towards Gideon before going back to Ellie.

"You know that young female cohort of yours likes you right?" He scratches his cheek awkwardly.

I simply respond, "I know." Which begs the question for him. "You two seem to get along though, you're not going to do anything about it?"

"She's someone that has had her life changed by me. More so than the feeling of like or love, it's something more akin to gratefulness that she feels. She doesn't know that now, but later in the future, I'm sure she'll distinguish the two on her own." I just shrug.

"You know, even when you say something disgustingly conceited like that, it doesn't sound vain coming from you." Gideon shakes his, taking a small sip of his wine.

"Because I don't mean it in a conceited way. To her, I am something like a hero who saved her life. She may have fantasies about a relationship between us like any young girl about her idol, but that doesn't mean she is in love with that person. Anyway, I'm sure you're not here to give me a love counseling. What is it that you wanted to discuss?" I turn to him, my face a bit more serious.

"Haa... why do I feel like I'm talking to someone same age as me. But yeah, you're right, how did your sister like the present you so kindly took from me?" He changed the subject, sitting down on the floor while leaning against the wall.

"Received as a compensation, not took. And I haven't given it to her yet. I will later." I correct his statement.

"Right. Well, after refining the blueprint and creating a plan, I sent it in to the Council of Dicathen. They approved it and is undergoing a construction plan right away." He

announces seriously, his usual joking manner nonexistent.

After the founding of the Six Lances, the Three Kings and Queens of Dicathen came together and announced to the public that the current monarchy of each of the three Kingdoms is changing into one big Council for all of Dicathen. This decision wasn't really up for debate but it did bring some groups of people to rebel against it. For now, the location of the Council of Dicathen was unknown, the only source of communication available through some trusted individuals while major broadcasts were publicized through each City's Governor.

"Congratulations. I'm sure they rewarded you well for that." I reply.

"Bah, money is just a means to an end for me, gold is but a useless commodity that only has use in buying stuff actually useful for me. But you, you're an asset that I do not want to let go. What is it you want brat? Money? Power? Knowledge? I can give you all of that if you be more open to me about what you know as well." He gets up, his beady eyes gleaming with curiosity.

"I don't intend to change how the world works for my own benefit. This Continent is doing just fine without any of it." I retort, making my intentions clear.

"So you're saying you have ideas on inventions capable of changing how this world works? Fascinating..." His ears must only be hearing this he wants to hear because my intentions weren't getting through to him.

Imbuing mana into my voice, I growl in a low voice so only he could hear. "Mr. Gideon, let me make it clear that I'm not here to indulge your selfish curiosities."

This shakes him up a bit at the different tone in my voice as it trembles his body.

"Well you sure sobered me up real quick. Yeah I guess you're right. How about a give and take then? I'm not asking for world changing inventions like that steam engine you gave me. I just want to get to know how you think really. I'll be your personal benefactor for whatever you need. Really, I'm desperate brat, don't make this old man plead anymore." His voice sounds sincere this time.

This was what I planned for but I didn't want to give in to his wishes too easily so I persisted. "Can I take your word for it?"

"Of course! What do you take me for? I'm a man of my words. You're quite a family

man so I understand why you were so interested in that Phoenix Wyrm necklace. I may not be a great mage but I know my way around artificing and magic implementation theory. Hell, you need some allowance for school right? So how about it? Yeah?" His beady eyes and electrocuted hair made him look eyen more pitiful.

Sticking my hand out, I give him a business smile that sends shivers down my now benefactor's body as his eyes twitch for a bit before shaking it.

The party eventually came to an end after the bell rang for midnight making it officially my sister's birthday. After more dancing, eating and drinking, and present giving the guests slowly started leaving until the maids eventually started cleaning the ballroom.

My parents gave my sister a pair of beautiful hair ties with ornamental bells that were silver on first glance but shined a rainbow reflection underneath a light. My sister excitedly asked my mother to tie her hair for her so her long hair now had twin ponytails.

My sister was pretty disappointed that the Twin Horns couldn't make it to her birthday since they were currently in a dungeon but she got over it quickly.

"Happy Birthday little sister." I give her my present and I hand the other box, which wasn't as prettily decorated, to my mother.

"Wow! It's so pretty!" My sister was ecstatic at the precious necklace that she probably will never know how much it's worth.

"T-this is gorgeous..." My mother's reaction was actually even stronger than Ellie's, her eyes locked on the light pink gem embedded on the white gold chain.

"Keep it on at all times okay?" I say directly to my sister by I also look at my mother so that she catches my drift.

"Where in the world did you get something like this Son?" My father was still a little tipsy but he was fully functional.

"I'm sure met Mr. Gideon right? I'm going to start working for him while he teaches me various things about magic. He gave me this as a token of my apprenticeship." It wasn't a lie but it wasn't exactly the full truth either.

"Well, I'll have to greet him one more time and thank him for taking care of you. I can't

believe my boy is going to attend Xyrus Academy soon! You're going to kick some butt out there right? OWW!" My mother clonks him on his head at the last statement and gives me a big hug, my sister following suit.

"Thank you for this present. We'll both keep it on, right Ellie?" She hugs my sister too.

"Yeah! We're matching now haha!" She looks happy and she'll be safe. That's all that really matters that this point.

 $\Diamond \Diamond \Diamond$

After my sister's birthday, my daily life turned very repetitive. My birthday passed by as well, and although the Twin Horns couldn't make it, their dungeon exploration leading them to the depths of the Continent, we did hear back from them from Guild Hall, indicating that they were still alive and okay. My birthday was nowhere near as grand as Ellie's but I had no problems with that.

Only a few people aside from mine and Lilia's family came, Gideon included of course. He gave me exactly what I asked for, which was a seal for my attribute mana for fire and water.

"While it's a little gaudy, keep this bracelet on at all times when you want to hide your mana attributes. It's still a trial product from me so be careful. The two charms on the bracelet each can hide and seal one elemental attribute mana from being sensed and gauged by others. Christ... I didn't believe you were a quadra-elemental Augmenter but..."

I've gotten a lot closer to Gideon over these past few months and, while he is quite eccentric and quirky, he's a good and trustworthy person. I haven't indulged him in much besides my abilities as a mage, which he took as quite a shock.

My birthday was, all in all, a quiet and pleasant time with my family. Elijah and me quickly went back into training, and while his abilities have become a lot less powerful, he has become a lot more adept in controlling his Earth and Metal Conjuring. He still has a lot to learn if he's going to catch up to me but we both have time.

As for me, training was going by steadily. I was planning to only use Earth and Wind Attribute mana, which probably accounts for 20% of my actual power, but that doesn't mean I plan on laying back and hiding myself in school. Why not enjoy the benefits of

being a good-looking prodigal dual elemental Augmenter? I had a family that I had to make proud right?

Elijah was much more eager to go to school than I was, expressing on many occasions what kind of "hot" female friends he'll make. I keep telling him that we're only twelve and that girls aren't "hot" at our age, but he filters that out and says he's going to go for older girls as well.

My father's training resumed a bit slower after he used all of the benefits from the beast core I brought, but he did manage to level up his fire augmentations, his skills and abilities become a light orange rather than red like most other Fire Augmenters.

Like I expected, the beast will didn't react to Elijah when I gave it to him. He couldn't even sense anything, becoming confused as to why I still had it.

With Ellie enjoying school and bringing a closer group of friends over more often and my mother and Tabitha enjoying the free time of being a housewife, life couldn't be any more content. For how long this would last, I would give my life to make sure it lasted until their life ended in their due time.

The eventful day in the Dicathen Calendar, marking the day of when the first steam engine ship named Dicatheous will set sail on the voyage to the other Continent, also marked another important day.

The Dicatheous was scheduled to set sail tomorrow, which is also the day both Elijah and I will start our first day of Xyrus Academy.



FLF-Ly waidaAAN